

English 624:
The Senior Project in Creative Writing
Procedures, Guidelines and Deadlines

The senior project in English: Creative Writing (English 624) is one of the most important pieces of work you will do as an undergraduate at Allegheny. Many see it as the culminating intellectual and creative experience of the major in English. As such, it is crucial that you read what follows with attention and care, and that you begin to plan and prepare early.

I. Preparation

Completing the Course Requirements

1. All standard classes for the English major (courses may double-count when appropriate)
2. Two of the following: English 205, 206, or 210
3. Two of the following: 301, 302, 303, 3054.
4. One of the following: 400, 401, 403
5. Senior Project in Creative Writing

Note: you must complete an advanced writing workshop in your genre of choice BEFORE you can submit a senior project in creative writing. **Absolutely no exceptions.**

Choosing a Genre

You should select a genre (poetry, fiction or creative non-fiction) with which you already have some familiarity (e.g. at least two workshops and much focused practice outside of class) and which reflects in some way the strongest creative work you have produced. You should supplement your own creative work with a structured academic study of that genre in courses and seminars, the “Forms of” courses in particular. Your creative work should demonstrate a familiarity with the conventions, styles, movements and craft of masterful writers in that genre.

The Senior Project Proposal and Audition

Students interested in finishing their creative writing emphasis at Allegheny with a senior project in original fiction, poetry or creative non-fiction must first pass a rigorous audition. [Auditions will be submitted to the creative writing faculty by the Monday of the tenth full week of classes the semester before you wish to write your senior project.](#) Leave three copies with the English department’s administrative assistant. Auditions will be evaluated carefully to decide if the student has the determination, technical acumen, and depth of literary knowledge to succeed in an independent creative writing project. Past performances in introductory and advanced workshops, as well as overall performance in English department coursework, will also inform this committee’s decision.

The audition should contain at least fifteen poems, two short stories, or twenty pages of creative non-fiction. Along with your writing sample, please attach a letter indicating your desire to complete a senior project in the genre you identify; also list the grades you received in the writing workshops and “Forms of” classes you have completed at Allegheny.

Senior Project in Creative Writing Requirements & Procedures

Students who pass their audition will choose to write an original creative thesis in: poetry (20-35

pages); fiction (50-70 pages), or creative non-fiction (50-70 pages). Students who do not pass their audition will finish the creative writing track and the English major by designing a focused project in literary criticism with their director (see page 4, below).

It is the student's responsibility to select a director in the semester prior to enrolling in English 624. It is recommended that you choose as your director someone who is already somewhat familiar with your creative work. If you are at all in doubt about whom to ask, talk with your academic advisor or the chair of the department about possibilities. You must choose a director and get that professor's approval by the time you register for English 624. A second reader will be assigned to you by the department.

II. Basic Requirements for the Senior Project

Preface

Think of your preface as an additional creative assignment. This is your chance to write an engaging, serious, and meditative piece of prose that provides your readers with some context for the creative manuscript that follows it. This preface should ponder the following things: your motivations for writing what you have written; the difficulties and successes you encountered while writing it; your method for organizing your project (how did you arrange the manuscript, and to what purpose?); your aesthetic models (what writing influenced you?) and intentions; your personal reasons for pursuing a senior project in creative writing. The best prefaces submitted in the past combined personal narrative with these artistic considerations; in fact, you are encouraged to use the first person in this preface. The best prefaces also must demonstrate the ability to do sophisticated literary analysis and close-reading, skills which you have practiced in all your English courses leading up to the senior project. It is a good idea to ask to see some exemplary prefaces from past senior projects.

This preface should be 8-15 pages, double-spaced. Use formal documentation and MLA style to acknowledge any secondary sources.

Organization & Formatting

Think carefully about how you arrange your creative project. Which poems or stories should come first, last and in-between? How do certain pieces complement others? To help answer these questions, you should study collections of poems and stories and essays by master writers and you might try to model your own theory of arrangement on theirs.

All poems should be single-spaced; all stories and essays should be double-spaced. Titles of individual pieces or chapters should be in bold print. Poems should not hug the left margin too closely, lest they be lost in the binding.

Conventions for spacing, dialogue, punctuation, grammar, spelling, etc. should be followed at all times, with some room for "poetic license." The project must be proofread scrupulously. There will be no opportunity for revision or correction of errors after the project is turned in; a large number of errors may result in a lowered grade or even in failure.

Your manuscript should be arranged as follows:

1. Title Page
2. Signature Page

3. Table of Contents
4. Preface
5. Manuscript
6. Notes (optional)
7. Acknowledgments/Thanks (optional)

See Appendix One and Appendix Two (below) for samples of the cover page and signature page.

Length

The majority of your creative project should consist of “new” work written during the semester in which your senior project is due. If you choose to include some work produced in your advanced workshop, you should expect to revise that work according to the demands of your senior project and with the guidance of your director.

Poetry: at least 25 pages, single-spaced

Fiction: at least 50 pages, double-spaced

Non-Fiction: at least 50 pages, double-spaced

Projects shorter than these requirements will typically not receive passing grades.

Deadline

The senior project is due by 4:00 on Friday of the twelfth full week of classes in the semester of enrollment. Bound copies must be placed in the department mailbox (not campus mailbox) of each faculty reader. If you are using the Allegheny College Print Shop, you must make sure to submit your senior project in a timely fashion.

Students whose auditions are not approved will complete their senior project requirements and the creative writing track by designing an alternate project with their proposed director, a project suited to that student’s interest and abilities, typically embodying sustained attention to a single text, or small unit of texts. Within these parameters you will produce a research-based work of literary criticism that investigates a subject pertinent to issues in creative writing (aspects of literary style, form, or creative technique, a focused analysis of a specific literary tradition or author, et cetera). You may find yourself wanting to explore in more detail work done in one of your 300-level or 400-level courses in the English department. Try to choose a subject pertinent to your experience as a creative writer; but keep in mind that your project must also satisfy the demands of your English major.

Research

Your project must consider previous scholarship and relevant material without being dependent on secondary sources for all substantive ideas. Senior projects are primarily evaluated on your ability to refute, amend, or expand upon previously published arguments and on the facility with which secondary materials are integrated.

Organization

The project should have a clearly articulated organizational rationale. Reasons for section divisions should be made evident, and conclusions should go beyond a summary of the project's argument.

Documentation Style

Please follow current MLA (Modern Language Association) format.

Issues of Grammar, Punctuation, and Mechanics

The prose in the senior project is expected to be mechanically correct in all respects (grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc.), and to be of consistent quality throughout. The project must be proofread scrupulously. There will be no opportunity for revision or correction of errors after the project is submitted. Please be aware that projects suffering from a significant number of errors will be graded accordingly.

III. The Oral Defense

Although your written manuscript is the most significant portion of your efforts and the most important determinant of your grade, the oral defense is a meaningful culmination of those efforts and can, depending upon its quality, raise or lower that grade by a partial letter grade. (For example, a "C" might be raised to a "C+" if the oral is considered especially successful.) You should arrive for the oral exam prepared to discuss the technical, stylistic, aesthetic and formal details of your work and your preface. While the emphasis of the oral will be on what you have written, discussion may range to include relevant issues, contexts, influences, and problems not directly addressed by the project. In a highly successful creative writing oral, you will demonstrate a sense of literary inheritance and a proficient understanding of literary criticism. You will demonstrate that the written project represents only a portion of what you have learned about the discipline and practice of creative writing.

No letter grade will be given at this point. After you have left the room, your board members will discuss the grade, which will be made known to you only when you receive your final grades for the semester.

IV. Plagiarism

As in all other areas of your academic work, plagiarism will not be tolerated in the senior project. Plagiarism includes direct or indirect un-cited use of any words or ideas other than your own. Using the words or ideas of another person without the proper citation is a crime. All acts of plagiarism will be taken extremely seriously and all incidents will be reported to the Honor Committee. The Honor Code can be found in the Student Handbook and also in the college catalogue and at <http://www.alleg.edu/academics/principles.html>.

V. Policies on Extensions and on Lateness

Extensions

An important aspect of writing the senior project is learning to adhere to a strict deadline. Students should make every effort to meet the deadline. If a genuine need for an

extension of the due date should arise, the student must petition members of their senior project board in writing. After receiving a petition, the board will discuss its merits and submit a recommendation to the chairperson of the department for final review. Petitioners will be informed of action taken as speedily as possible. No second petition is permissible, and the petitioner may not bypass his or her board to seek the direct approval of the departmental chairperson.

Lateness

Late projects will be handled in the following manner: a senior project submitted after the deadline will be penalized by one whole grade on the college grade scale after the board has determined the final grade for the project (for example from "A" to "B" or "C" to "D"). If the senior project is not turned in by Tuesday at 4 p.m. following the Friday deadline, it will not be accepted. The lowest final grade after penalties have been imposed shall be no lower than a D unless the quality of the project itself in the judgment of the committee merits an F.

General Goals of the Creative Writing Project in English

Students completing a senior project in English should strive to

- put into independent practice the artistic and critical skills cultivated in earlier writing and literature classes;
- employ literary models and other influences in useful, striking and original ways;
- find subjects and voices for projects that are as appropriately ambitious as they are well-conceived and revised;

- gain a thorough understanding of their craft and traditional form;
- undertake successfully the challenge of assembling an original manuscript sustained over the course of the required number of pages;
- comprehend literary traditions and trends, and demonstrate a clear sense of where in such trajectories their project lies;
- assimilate their learning during the process fully enough to converse intelligently about their subjects in the oral;
- organize and manage their independent work time effectively;
- take feedback from faculty constructively.

In completing the project, students should be able to

- balance literary language and form skillfully to create resonance, complexity and depth;
- create a series of artifacts that are vibrant, compelling and sufficient unto themselves, and arrange those artifacts in justifiable ways;
- demonstrate an awareness of the literary tradition from which they draw or borrow, and articulate the value and implications of particular models;
- create an engaged, engaging preface that examines influence and process, deepening and complicating the project even as it clarifies;
- talk about their subject in a poised and learned fashion;

- justify, on artistic and rhetorical grounds (in the preface, and in the oral) decisions they made constructing their project;
- follow correctly the protocols of quotation, citation, and documentation, as described by the current MLA style manual;
- produce clean copy—avoiding spelling, grammatical or other mechanical mistakes;
- interact productively with their senior project advisor;
- revise their writing successfully.

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APPENDIX ONE: COVER PAGE

TITLE OF SENIOR PROJECT

By [Author]

A Senior Comprehensive Project in Creative Writing

Submitted to the Department of English at Allegheny College

By [Author]

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Bachelor of Arts Degree

[Date]

APPENDIX TWO: SIGNATURE PAGE

TITLE OF SENIOR PROJECT

By [Author]

A Senior Comprehensive Project in Creative Writing

Submitted to the Department of English at Allegheny College

By [Author]

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for a Bachelor of Arts Degree

[Date]

Professor [Director] _____

Professor [Second Reader] _____

I hereby recognize and pledge to fulfill my responsibilities as defined in the Honor Code and to maintain the integrity of both myself and the college community as a whole.

_____[Author's Signature]_____

[Author's Full Name: Printed]