

UBC Creative Writing Information Session 2023: Introduction

So this section of our videos we're going to be talking about putting together your application and giving some details on what we're looking for and how it all works. Every year we get 200 and more applications and we accept 15 to 20 percent of applicants. Our tips we'll be giving you throughout here are how to put together a great package and specific things you should do and consider in preparing your package, we'll be covering the portfolio, your artistic statement, your letters of reference, and your GPA, what we consider when we look at your GPA.

And then, but first of all, there are some things that you can do.

So, I'm going to be the one to remind you that as you consider the things that you can do, there's a whole lot that's written down already. So, this is good news, and I want to direct you to those resources because you really can prepare for the preparation of an application to our program and get yourself into that 15%, you know, which is a smallish target admittedly, but you can put yourself way ahead in that competition by getting into the program via the published material that we have on our website. So, I really encourage you to use that resource and I'm going to guide you towards a couple of the resources in particular.

If you drill down through the UBC School of Creative Writing website, through our admissions tab,

you will find that there is an entire review of the admissions requirements for grad and postdoctoral

studies at UBC. So that is an excellent starting place to get your head around the sort of framework

in which our school exists alongside other graduate programs. So familiarize yourself a little

bit with the base UBC requirements for people that are entering graduate programs, and that'll be an

excellent starting point to thinking about what you need to include and the kinds of things that you should be highlighting as you put your application package together. The next thing that you want to take a look at is a very detailed review on our website in that same location that I just described through the School of Creative Writing and Admissions is to look at the Creative Writing MFA application guidelines in particular. So now we're drilling down directly to the program requirements and the things that we as a program are looking for. So here you're going to find all of that utterly crucial but boring stuff, like the dates and the deadlines that you need to hit when you're considering this process, the actual application form, something that you can download well in advance to review and consider what it requires. It'll give you information on where to submit the various documents that are involved in your package, copies of your official university transcript, a statement of intent that we're going to ask you to write to tell us a bit about yourself, a literary CV, a creative portfolio, which we're going to talk about in a moment, a very crucial part of your application package, where you share with us some of the writing that you feel you've done that is the strongest. And lastly, the names and the email addresses of people that you're going to use as references or what you'll hear referred to in academic circles as referees. So, on our website in that same location, you can find a really detailed discussion of what the documentation required would be and where these things have to be submitted. One of the last things that you'll find under the Creative Writing MFA application guidelines section of our website in the admissions section is a typical timeline for

application every year and it roughly goes that applications are opening up in the fall in October typically, they typically close on a deadline in early January, and then offers after the the adjudication process has occurred within our program involving our faculty, the offers to prospective students in both our on-campus program and our optional residency program go out in the spring. So that's sort of the calendar year that we go through every year as we consider the various people that want to be in our program. Another document that is available through the website that is utterly crucial, and the grad chairs actually write it every year, so we're intimately familiar with it, and we love to recommend it, but it actually is very necessary, is the MFA Student Handbook. So in the MFA Student Handbook, you're really going to find what might be thought of as the Bible of how to do the Creative Writing Program at UBC. It's all the components of the program, the genres offered, the work opportunities in the program, the structure of the credits that are required to complete the program, a long discussion about how your thesis will work, this is a really excellent resource for you to prepare yourself for the application process by becoming fully aware of what the program actually entails. These videos are part of the offering on that website, so if you've discovered this video, make sure that you watch the other ones that live right next door to this one, because there's a pretty wide range of topics that are addressed by Sharon and myself, but also by our program director and by students and alumni of the program. So those are really crucial perspectives for you to consider as you think about your application. The last thing I think you're going to want to look at and prepare yourself before is to sort of think about which part of our program you want to fit into.

So check out the information that we have posted on our joint programs. We do of course offer an

MFA in Creative Writing, which is our mainstay degree offering here at UBC School of Creative Writing. But there are some really key, interesting, and incredibly valuable joint programs that you

could consider, so you want to make sure you're aware of those. There's an MFA in Creative Writing

and Theatre, and there's also an MFA in Film Production and Creative Writing, which combine disciplinary instruction from two realms of the writing world that can combine powerfully

depending on the career that you're hoping to build for yourself. So those are some comments on things that you can do, some pre-reading that you could do before you even begin to put your

package together. Yes, and then once you've sort of done all of that background work and the detailed work, we would really encourage you to research our faculty. Consider the work done by

the teaching faculty and the potential fit with your own plans and ambitions. We have a huge range

of faculty and there's a lot of information on the work and publications that they have done.

And have a look and see where your interests lie and if there are people there that sort of touch on those for you. And then the next thing to do is to prepare your most representative portfolio, as Timothy mentioned. Submit your strongest work. Don't be afraid to take a risk. Show us who you

want to be as a writer. When we read the portfolios, we want to be able to remember you for who you are.

And carefully consider your artistic statement. That's part of the application.

Consider how does your artistic statement and vision connect to your submission. Do you address

your own plans as a writer? Do you say what you hope to accomplish in the MFA and where you hope

that you're going to go as a writer? This is really important to us as we read through the applications.

So as Sharon has noted, submitting your strongest work is just the best approach, both in terms of

maximizing your chances of acceptance, but also in terms of maximizing your own confidence in the

application that you put together. The best approach is just to focus on what you think is

the strongest. But we do get a lot of specific questions and the most the senior ranking question

I think we get relates to genre. So how many genres do I need to submit? Should I submit two

or should I submit even three? And, you know, what are their genre quotas? Like, should I,

if I write poetry, should I favor that or should I favor fiction? Do you really like to teach

fiction most of all? So, let me just make a few comments about that because it is a big,

confusing world here in post-secondary education with respect to genre and creative writing. It's

also an evolving situation. So, life has changed, you know. At 40, 50 years ago, I don't think there

there were creative writing programs in North America that taught outside of

fiction and poetry, it was very limited. Here at UBC Creative Writing, we

respect, honor, and teach across a really wide range from fiction, poetry,

nonfiction, screen, television, even translation and lyrical song lyrics, for

example. So we're really open to a very wide range of ways that the writing

impulse can be honored and pursued. So with that in mind, how should you think

about your portfolio. I mean, let's start with the number of genres that you submit.

I mean, the temptation would be to go as wide as you can go. I think it's very natural that you might wish to do so to show us your range. And that is, there's a lot of respect for people who do have a range. But I would just, the only comment I would make is don't force it. If you think that you're really strong in two and that you've done a bit of poetry but you're not very confident in that, I would stick to the two genres that you really would like us to see that you have some existing capabilities in. We are a strongly portfolio-driven adjudication process, so it's really important that you put pages into your portfolio that you can be proud of and that you think you've really brought the strongest stuff to us that you can. So, perhaps if you have a theory genre that you have dabbled in but that you don't feel very strong in, that's the kind of thing that you perhaps mention in your artistic statement or or in your introductory comments to just let us know that you do work on other things, but the work that you want to share with us is drawn from your strongest genres.

Do we have genre quotas? We don't. Although we, without question, look for breadth in our program,

we are trying to serve the needs of people across the genre communities.

So as we look at a bundle of applications, we are aware that we would like to draw from different areas.

But again, that consideration is junior to the consideration of submitting your strongest work.

So that's really how you should make this decision.

Another question that we get a lot when it comes to assembling a portfolio is, do I need to have publications?

Am I going to look very weak as an applicant if I don't have publications?

And I really stress that publications are not necessary.

Clearly, if you have them, you'd want to let us know.

It's never irrelevant to know that other magazines and other editors have looked at your work and have admired it enough to accept it for

So you want to share that news because it's good news. It's always good news for writers.

But we don't rank our portfolios based on whether there's publications in the past.

We assume everyone's coming into the program with a view to developing a publishing career.

And that's what the faculty are here to help our students to do.

So we read the work, published or unpublished, based on its quality, its originality, and what's exciting there in the work for us as fellow writers.

So just keep that in mind as you put your stuff together.

Our students have a really wide range of backgrounds, especially in the optional residency program.

I will point out where people often have other careers and come in with a really diverse set of backgrounds.

So you are unlikely to stand out for your lack of publications because you'll be alongside many other applicants who are in the same position.

So that should be no impediment to you whatsoever.

I think those are the few things I'd like to raise with respect to putting together your portfolio with confidence.

And back to Sharon now for a bit more on the artistic statement.

Yes, on the artistic statement, what we really want, those are always so odd to write and they're a bit challenging, but what we really want to know is who you are.

Like what excites you, what kind of writing are you interested in doing, what kind of writers do you follow, and so on.

And tell us why you think we are a good fit for you and be honest.

And this is where the research that Timothy was mentioning earlier, like,

read the material at our website, look at that student handbook and see how that fits

with what you want to do and tell us how that fits. And in terms of reference or referees letters, which are required as a graduate application at UBC, we know that not everyone is going to have great access to potential referees. We understand this. Not everybody has, you know, a connection to

somebody who's, you know, like super famous or something, you know. But what we want, you can ask

your referee to give you give us a more holistic view of yourself, your work ethic, your dedication

to your writing, your ability to pursue work at an academic level, to study at that level. That's

kind of what they could address. So, you know, don't stress about it too much, but at the same

time that gives you another way of doing it and approaching it. And is my GPA a concern,

your grade point average? There is a minimum GPA to get into graduate studies. Sometimes that can be

mitigated by a very strong portfolio and an argument by the faculty. So, our evaluation of

your portfolio is the major consideration. So, it's again back to the creative vision and creative work

that you submit.

So, let me just sort of wrap things up here with a comment on

the process. It feels a bit murky and mysterious, I'm sure, to many

applicants to spend a lot of time putting together a package,

and then to get it over to the Creative, to the School of Creative Writing, and

then radio silence for a while, and you wonder

what on earth happens to all of the material that you spent so much time

preparing. So I wanted to just give you a little bit of an insight behind the closed doors of the

adjudication process so you have a sense of what's going on. I can tell you that we read in three rounds of reading. For confidentiality readings, we're never going to be able to share with you how far your application went in that round process, but you should be reassured that you will be read multiple times. Each round consists of multiple readers drawn from our faculty, and you will be read by people who have familiarity with the genre that you're submitting in. So working professional writers who have experience with fiction or with poetry or with screen or with lyrics or whatever your genre is, will have cast their eyes across your work, will have read it in detail, and they will have read it in detail multiple times. This will happen in an iterative way and with an elimination process until we come to the candidates that that we're going to make our offers for. But that's the reassurance that we can offer you as a school, that you are given extremely close consideration by people who are familiar with the genre that you'd like to work in. I think to close Sharon and my comments today, I'll just sort of summarize in a bullet list sort of way how you can get your head around the application process and and prepare yourself for it, I think, to maximize your chances at success.

I strongly encourage, beginning at the top of our comments today then, that you read the website right down to the granular information that's available there on deadlines and process and what the calendar looks like, the documentation required to support your application

and where all those different parts of the puzzle

have to be sent.

I think it's really important

to read the application section, the guidelines,

the submission forms, get your head around all of that,

administrative stuff that exists behind the scenes in any application process.

Do read the MFA Handbook. It's as close a primer to what the MFA program is going to be like as I

think is available to anybody who's outside the program. It really gives you a detailed look at

the way we do things here at the school and the life as it's lived by the program's participants,

both instructors and students. Carefully pick your strongest writing when it comes to assembling your

portfolio. Think about the writing that you've done, that you love the most, and that you really just feel the best about.

Consider your artistic statement with respect to who you are as a writer and how you would like us to know you.

And finally, give some consideration to referees' letters, but not in a way that would create anxiety for you if you don't have access to famous writers to support your application.

You should understand that the eyes of all adjudicators will be primarily on your portfolio with a view to looking at you as a writer,

and the writing that you're able to produce will be thinking about you as a student based on that portfolio,

and our decision is going to be largely governed by our response to that submitted material.

So that brings us to the end of these comments on the application process.

Thank you for spending time with us, and I wish you all the best as you consider whether you'd like to be part of what we do here

here at the UBC School of Creative Writing.