



Graduate Handbook for the
Master of Arts and Master of Science
in Professional and Technical Writing
2025-2026

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All information is subject to change.
Students are responsible for checking relevant University web sites
for current deadlines and updates.

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1. The M.A. and M.S. in Writing (Professional and Technical Writing)

The Department of English offers graduate work leading to the Master of Arts in Writing and the Master of Science in Writing degrees. The 48-credit M.A./M.S. in Writing is designed for students who are prepared to undertake advanced work in the field. The program provides a range of courses in Professional and Technical Writing. The motives and destinations of the students in the program vary, but the focus on writing to earn a living will attract those who wish to make writing a career.

2. Requirements

For Professional and Technical Writing, the department requires a minimum of 28 graduate credits in writing. The remainder of the student's program may, with the approval of the advisor, include coursework in fields related to writing. In every case, the student's program must be approved by the advisor and the Chair of the M.A./M.S. in Writing Committee.

3. Course of Study: Professional and Technical Writing

Our curriculum builds on the talent and expertise of professionals to teach students the latest and most relevant tools and methods to be effective as technical communicators. The coursework for the M.A. / M.S. Professional and Technical Writing program is categorized into three segments. The program culminates with completion of the final portfolio or thesis.

Core Courses (16 credits)

4 courses form the foundation of the curriculum. These 4 courses reflect the curriculum's balanced attention to critical academic inquiry and professionalization for work in industry, government or the non-profit sector. Core courses do not have to be taken sequentially, although students starting in the fall quarter are advised to enroll in WR 525 their first term.

- WR 525 Advanced Technical Writing
- WR 531 Advanced Topics in Technical Writing Technologies
- WR 532 Frameworks for Technical Writing
- WR 533 Research Methods for Technical Writers

Technical Writing Electives (20 credits)

Students must take a total of 20 credits of coursework drawn from the following list of courses:

- WR 510 Selected Topics in Writing (may be repeated for credit with different topics)
- WR 524 Grant Writing for Professional Writers
- WR 526 Document Design
- WR 527 Technical Editing
- WR 529 Writing Computer Documentation
- WR 531 Advanced Topics in Technical Writing Technologies (may be repeated for credit with different topics)
- WR 560 Introduction to Book Publishing
- WR 572 Copyediting
- WR 562 Book Design Software
- WR 566 Digital Skills
- WR 565 Intellectual Property and Copyright
- ENG 513 Teaching and Tutoring Writing
- ENG 514 Contemporary Composition Theories
- ENG 515 Research Methods in Rhetoric & Composition
- ENG 590 Advanced Topics in Rhetoric and Composition Studies (may be repeated for credit with different topics)
- ENG 516 History of Rhetoric
- ENG 525 Practical Grammar

Open Electives (12 credits)

Students may take any additional 500-level courses in WR or ENG.

Students may also use open elective credits to tailor their degree to their interests using the by-arrangement options below:

- WR 501 Research (1-4 credits)
- WR 502 Independent Study (1-8 credits)
- WR 503 Thesis (6-9 credits.) Thesis credits are for students pursuing the thesis option. A minimum of 6 credits of Thesis is required for thesis option students.
- WR 504 or WR 511 Internship
- WR 505 Writing and Conference 1-4
- WR 509 Practicum 1-4

Students are limited to 8 credits combined of WR 501, WR 502 & WR 505 and 8 credits combined of WR 504/511 & 509.

Students with a GTA teaching appointment are required to take the following courses:

- ENG 518 College Composition Teaching
- WR 509 Teaching Technical Communication

Students may also do relevant graduate coursework outside of the department for open elective credit with approval from the Director of Professional and Technical

Writing. Relevant courses are commonly offered in Communication, Applied Linguistics and The School of Business, although other units may also offer relevant courses.

NOTE: Students who were admitted to and enrolled in the program before Fall 2019 have the option of fulfilling **either** the program requirements described above **or** the program requirements that were in place during a previous term in which they were enrolled in the program. If a continuing student prefers to use previous requirements, they can find those described in past issues of the [PSU Bulletin](#). Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Professional and Technical Writing program does not anticipate that continuing students should notice any disruption in fulfilling the current requirements listed above.

4. Second Language Requirement

M.S. students are not required to fulfill the second language requirement. However, students who choose to complete a second language may receive the M.A. in Writing: Professional and Technical Writing degree. All M.A. students at Portland State are required to have experience with a second language. We strongly encourage M.A. students to fulfill their language requirement early in their programs. Students must fulfill the second language requirement before completing the final portfolio review. Please note your final defense will not be scheduled until this requirement has been fulfilled. You may do so in one of the following ways:

- Pass a 203-level course. If you have previously completed this coursework as a part of your B.A. degree, this counts as fulfilling the requirement.
- Pass an exam administered by the World Languages department:
 - For students who would like to fulfill their language requirement with Spanish or French, we recommend you take the WebCAPE exam. We do not recommend taking the CLEP, which is more costly.
 - If you are testing in other languages taught at Portland State, your exam will be conducted for free with a professor in that field.
 - If you are testing in a language not taught at Portland State, you may need to take the BYU test. These exams are administered by the World Languages and Literatures Department and you should consult them for more information.
- If you were born outside the U.S., you may prove that you have passed the TOEFL in English or provide high school or college transcripts from your home country, with notarized translation.

The Department of World Languages and Literatures sets the second language policy for the University. For further information students should consult that department's website at: pdx.edu/world-languages/second-language-requirements

5. Independent Study

The English department recognizes that By-Arrangement study can be a valuable means of expanding the curriculum and allowing students to pursue special interests. By-Arrangement study may be arranged under several course titles. By-arrangement

coursework counts towards the Open Electives requirement for the degree; see Section 3, above, for information on the applicable limits on this category of coursework.

Students wishing to pursue By-Arrangement study should seek the approval of a faculty member willing to undertake the arrangement. To register for these courses you must fill out a [By Arrangement Request Form](#) online. Faculty time to supervise independent study is limited. Please keep in mind that professors choose to take on these courses on top of their regular workload.

Following are the course numbers for By-Arrangement:

- WR 501: Research. Students may take from 1 to 4 credits of WR 501 as they prepare for their Focus Area or their Qualifying Essay. Students should arrange to work with a faculty supervisor, preferably their advisor.
- WR 502: Independent Study. Students may take 1-4 credits of WR 502 to pursue an independent research or applied project. To set up a WR 502, write a short description of your project and discuss it with your faculty mentor to determine the scope (number of credits) of the project and the timeline for working on it.
- WR 504: Cooperative Education/Internship. Academic work with a faculty advisor or mentor in conjunction with either paid or unpaid employment outside the university.
- WR 505: Writing and Conference. One-on-one work with a faculty advisor or mentor on a student writing project; this may also include reading and discussion.
- WR 509: Practicum. For students who are assisting a faculty member in a research, writing, or community-based project, or in teaching a course.

6. Graduation Requirements: Overview

Due to ongoing changes in policies and procedures, always check with the English Department Program Coordinator (grdstudy@pdx.edu), the [Graduate School](#), and your program adviser regarding the following information.

When checking deadlines and other policies with the Graduate School, remember that MS/MA Professional and Technical Writing students may complete a portfolio or a research-based thesis to complete the graduation requirements. The portfolio and thesis options have very different timelines and serve different purposes for supporting the student's career and academic goals.

The required elements of your graduation process are:

1. Completion of the required 48 credits of **coursework**.
2. A **professional quality digital portfolio** that demonstrates your best work over time and across genres or a **research-based thesis** developed in close consultation with a faculty advisor.

3. A **written exam (for portfolio option students only)**. The topic of the written exam will be based on the contents of the portfolio. Your primary program adviser will write the exam question and deliver it to you after receiving your portfolio.
4. An **oral exam**. The oral exam will focus on the portfolio and on your response to the written exam or the completed thesis. The oral exam requires you to identify two to three faculty members who will serve as your faculty committee. This committee will ask questions and make comments on your portfolio and written exam response or thesis (see below).

7. Graduation Requirement Timelines

Timeline for the Portfolio Graduation Option

Step 1: In the quarter before the term you plan to graduate, submit the [Application for Awarding of Master's Degree, Doctoral Degree, or Graduate Certificate](#). (While the Graduate School stipulates that you can file this form "no later than the first week of the term," don't delay that long!).

Step 2: Make sure that you are registered for at least 1 graduate credit during the quarter in which you plan to graduate.

Step 3: Finalize the Program Requirements Worksheet you started in your 3rd term according to your [DARS audit](#) to verify that your coursework has been (or is very nearly) completed. Work with the English Department Program Coordinator (grdstudy@pdx.edu) to run your DARS audit, and work with your adviser to complete the Program Requirements Worksheet.

Step 4: Identify faculty willing to serve on your graduate committee. Ask one or two faculty members (in addition to your primary program adviser) to serve on your committee. Your committee thus consists of two or three faculty members, one of whom must be a tenured or fixed term faculty. You must select your committee and notify the graduate coordinator by **Week 3** of your graduation term.

Step 5: Canvass these faculty committee members about a mutually convenient date and time to meet for your oral exam. The date of the oral exam should be no later than **Week 9** of your graduation term.

Step 6: Schedule your oral exam by working with the English Department graduate coordinator (grdstudy@pdx.edu), who will book a room. The graduate coordinator can also assist with any A/V needs (Skype connections, etc.) you may have.

Step 7: No later than four weeks prior to the oral exam date, give a copy of your

completed portfolio to each faculty committee member. The oral exam will consist of discussion and questions/answers based on your portfolio and on your written exam response.

Step 8: Approximately one week later, expect to receive a written exam question from your primary program adviser, as well as a due date for your response to the exam question.

Step 9: Meet with your faculty committee at the date and time agreed upon for your oral exam. Your committee will inform you about your graduation status immediately after the oral exam. If successful, your remaining graduation paperwork will be processed by the Department; no further action will be required on your part.

Timeline for the Thesis Graduation Option

Step 1: The default graduation completion option is the professional portfolio. If you intend to pursue the thesis-option in lieu of a portfolio, you must declare your intent no later than by the end of your third quarter of enrollment, if taking courses full-time, or by the end of 24 credits, if taking courses part-time. It is up to students to find a faculty advisor qualified in the area of research to oversee the thesis project. To declare the intent to pursue the thesis option, submit via email to the program director and to the graduate coordinator a statement of intent that includes a working title of the thesis project, the name of the faculty advisor who will oversee the project and a timeline for completing the project. The timeline should include the [institutional deadlines for thesis completion](#) prescribed by the PSU Graduate School.

Subsequent steps: The timeline for submitting the final thesis and scheduling the oral exam will vary depending on the quarter of graduation. These steps should be detailed in the letter of intent and must be approved by the faculty advisor overseeing the thesis project.

8. Pre-admission Credit and Transfer Credit

A maximum of 16 approved credits earned before admission to the program may be applied to the degree. This “pre-admission credit” limit applies to both transfer credits earned outside PSU or at PSU before admission to the program.

A separate 16-credit allotment of transfer credit may be approved for coursework taken after admission to the M.A./M.S. program (courses taken elsewhere over the summer, for example). However, a maximum of one-third of a student’s total of 48 credits may be taken outside PSU, so only 16 of the possible combined 32 transferred credits (pre-admission and post-admission) may be from outside PSU.

Students must download a [Proposed Transfer Credit Form](#) (GO-21M), and meet with their advisor and the program director for credit evaluation and approval.

All Pre-admission and Transfer credits must be graduate level and must be: 1) letter graded B- or higher; 2) not be used for any other degree at any institution; 3) no more than seven years old at the time the Master's degree is awarded; 4) applicable to an M.A./M.S. degree at the originating institution without qualification.

9. Advisement

As soon as you are accepted into the program, you should contact the program director to introduce yourself and receive advice on enrolling for courses during your initial term of study. The program director is Sarah Read (read3@pdx.edu).

During your first term in the program, you will be assigned a faculty advisor who will assist you in progressing through the program and completing all graduation requirements. If your advisor is on leave or otherwise unavailable, contact the Department's Program Coordinator for help with any procedural or registration issues.

10. One-credit Courses

Graduate Assistantships, some student loans, scholarships, and grants require full-time status. At PSU, a full-time course load is 9 credits or more, half time is 8 credits or less. This means that if you enroll for two 4-credit courses you will not have full-time status. However, in addition to Independent Study (explained above), the department offers a range of 1-credit graduate course options. These courses will be announced in advising materials prior to the beginning of registration.

11. GPA

Although grades of C+, C, and C- are below the graduate standard, they may be counted as credit toward the Master's degree with specific written approval of the Department Chair. Students must have a B average (3.0 GPA) on the courses fulfilling the degree requirements (courses listed on the Program Requirements Worksheet that you started in your 3rd term of coursework). Grades of D and F carry no graduate credit.

12. Financial Aid, Graduate Assistantships, Awards, and Employment

Information on graduate financial aid is available on [the Office of Financial Aid website](#).

For graduate students both in-state from out-of-state, the Laurels Graduate Award is available. Information about the Laurels and other competitive scholarships is available on the [Graduate School website](#).

English Department nomination is required for several all-University competitions, including the Oregon Lottery Graduate Scholarship and the University Club Fellowship Award. Any student who would like to be nominated for one of these scholarships should speak to their advisor or the Student Affairs Committee about their qualifications. A computerized database of national and local scholarships is available through the [Portland State Scholarship Search site](#) and in the Millar Library.

Graduate Assistantships

The Department has a very limited number of Graduate Assistantships available primarily to first-year graduate students in which they teach in a variety of contexts: 100- and 200-level composition courses, tutoring in the Writing Center, and, in limited cases, assisting full-time faculty as teaching assistants. Depending on their qualifications, they may also teach courses in creative writing or technical writing. Graduate assistants receive both tuition remission and a stipend for the academic year.

Many non-academic divisions of the University offer Graduate Assistantships, including: University Communications, Campus Recreation, University Housing, The Office of International Affairs, the Women's Resource Center, the Queer Resource Center, and Student Health and Counseling. Unfortunately, there is no centralized listing of these non-academic Assistantships; each office must be contacted individually (the Graduate School does not keep a list of available Graduate Assistantships each year).

The University also offers the following employment/professional development possibilities:

University Studies Graduate Mentor

University Studies Mentors come from all academic backgrounds and work with Sophomore Inquiry courses. Mentors plan and facilitate 50-minute mentor sessions for Freshman Inquiry, Sophomore Inquiry or Transfer Transition courses. Mentors serve as friends, colleagues and teachers, helping students learn the academic ropes. All new mentors must enroll in a four-credit Education course that is offered in the spring and a two-week fall training prior to the start of school. Mentors work 10-20 hours per week. For more information see the [Mentoring Program website](#).

The Professional and Technical Writing Graduate Award

This award recognizes the best graduation portfolio for a student in the Master's in Professional and Technical Writing program. Students who have applied for graduation in Spring term, or who graduated in the preceding Winter or Fall terms, should send a link to their final graduation portfolio to grdstudy@pdx.edu by **April 30** to be considered. The subject line for the email should be "Professional and Technical Writing Best Graduate Portfolio Award Submission" and the email should contain the student's full name, PSU ID number and term of graduation.

Work Study Positions

If you qualify for the federal work-study program, you may apply for a variety of jobs with the English department or elsewhere on campus, including writing, website development, and office work. These jobs are also posted on the [Career Center website](#).

Handshake

All current PSU students and alums have access to Handshake, a job and internship search platform specifically for PSU students. MTPW students have had success

finding both paid and unpaid opportunities via this platform: <https://portlandstate.joinhandshake.com/login>. Handshake is maintained by the PSU Career Center (<https://www.pdx.edu/careers/>). You can contact the Career Center for help in searching Handshake and in preparing job search materials.

13. Appendix 1: Admission Requirements

Admission to graduate study is granted on the basis of evidence of suitable preparation and the probability of success in the intended field of study. In Professional and Technical Writing, strong writing skills are considered central, but applicants do not need to have a previous degree in English or Writing. A bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited institution is required.

The MA/MS in Professional and Technical Writing program offers rolling admissions which follow the University's admission deadlines as follows: April 1st for Fall, Sept. 1st for Winter, Nov. 1st for Spring. **Please note that if you wish to be considered for a Departmental Graduate Assistantship you must apply for fall admission by February 15.**