Graduate Admissions FAQs

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Where can I find information on your eligibility criteria and application process?

A: Both can be found on our admissions page.

Q: Do you require Ph.D. applicants to have a master's degree? Would having a master's degree improve my chances of acceptance?

A: No, we do not require Ph.D. applicants to have an master's degree and we regularly accept applicants with no prior graduate training. While having a master's degree may make you a stronger applicant in one sense - because you've had an additional year or more to hone your skills and develop your interests - applicants without a master's degree are not automatically at a competitive disadvantage.

Q: The application fee poses a financial hardship for me. Is a fee waiver available?

A: Our fee waivers are managed entirely by the Grad Division of the School of Arts and Sciences. To request a waiver, you should email Patricia Rea (gdasadmis@sas.upenn.edu), Associate Director for Admissions, with a brief letter stating the reason for your request. Please be advised that applicants must demonstrate a clear and compelling case of financial hardship.

Please submit your waiver request at least 2 weeks before the deadline, by Dec 1st. Though requests made after Dec 1st may be considered, there's a strong possibility that they won't be answered in time due to the volume of requests coming in.

If you are granted a waiver, you will receive a code to enter into the application at time of submission. Please do not submit your application while your request is pending unless you have chosen to forego the waiver.

Q: Is there a minimum GPA an applicant must have to be considered? Can you share the average GPA of past admitted students?

A: No, we do not have a minimum GPA requirement, and we do not keep track of the undergraduate GPAs of our admitted students.

Our admissions committee reviews all elements of your application to evaluate your potential for success in the program. Grades and test scores provide important information, but we recognize that they are not the whole picture of you as an applicant and future scholar. Writing does weigh quite heavily in our discipline, so be advised that a well-conceived and well-written statement of purpose and writing sample can go a long way in setting you apart from the applicant pool.

Q: My undergraduate institution does not use the 4.0 GPA scale. How should I enter my GPA into the application form?

A: Do not convert your GPA into a 4.0 scale. You should select "Other GPA Scale," which allows you to enter a number out of a total (____ out of ____). If your GPA was an 8.5 on a scale of 10, you would enter "8.5 out of 10." If your GPA was a 143 out of 200, then you would enter "143 out of 200."

If you graduated from a British university that classifies final grades by first-, second-, or third-class , you may enter 1 out of 1, 1 out of 2, 2 out of 2, or 1 out of 3. Your reviewers will see that your graduated from a British institution and your transcripts will reflect your honours status. You should also send a brief email to Meghan Hall (hallme@sas.upenn.edu) to let her know that you've entered this designation.

Q: It says that I only need to submit an unofficial transcript. What is considered an unofficial transcript?

A: Yes, you only need to submit an unofficial transcript with your application. This can be either a downloaded transcript from your college's student portal or a scanned copy of an official transcript. Accepted students will be required to submit official transcripts for all attended undergraduate and graduate institutions before beginning the program.

Q: My transcript is in another language. Do I need to have it translated or evaluated?

A: No, since you only need to submit an unofficial transcript for this application, you do not need to get an evaluation or professional translation. We would appreciate it if you provided an English translation of the transcript (which does not need to be certified or professionally-done) and you may apend this translation to your unofficial transcript as a single PDF file.

Admitted students will need to submit official transcripts before beginning the program. At that time, we will determine whether we need an official translation or evaluation.

Q: Should I submit transcripts for community college courses or a study abroad semester if those courses appear on my other transcripts?

A: It is generally better to include all transcripts with your application. If you are unable to access your community college or study abroad transcripts, their appearance on your main transcripts will be fine.

Q: Am I eligible to apply if I earned a three year bachelors degree offered by Indian universities?

A: Yes, the three year Indian B.A. is accepted.

Q: Do you require GRE scores?

A: No, as of the Fall 2022 application cycle, we will not require applicants to submit GRE scores. If you have applied before, your GRE scores may still be in our system and will automatically attach to your application. We can't remove them manually, unfortunately, but the admissions committee will disregard these.

Q: Does the English department accept recommendation letters from Interfolio for the Ph.D. in English application?

A: No, the University of Pennsylvania uses CollegNet software and our version of CollegeNet is not compatible with Interfolio. Letters should be uploaded directly into your application by your recommenders. If this is a problem, the recommender may email their letter directly to our Graduate Coordinator, Meghan Hall (hallme@sas.upenn.edu).

NOTE: Letters of recommendation must come directly from the recommender's email address to preserve confidentiality. Letters submitted by the student will not be accepted.

Q: Is the deadline for receiving letters of recommendation different from the December 15th application deadline?

A: The deadlines are the same, but we will accept letters of recommendation that come in after the December 15th deadline so long as your application was submitted on time. This ensures that you are not penalized if your recommenders are late with their letters.

You are able to track who has and has not submitted their letter via the application portal. We recommend that applicants take steps to remind their recommenders of upcoming deadlines.

Q: What are the English language requirements of your program? Do I need to submit TOEFL scores?

A: Graduate students in the English Department must have a strong command of English to be successful in coursework, dissertation writing, and teaching undergraduates. Applicants with citizenship or permanent resident status in the United States, Canada, England, Australia, or New Zealand do not have to prove their English proficiency.

Citizens of other countries may satisfy this requirement by either 1) submitting TOEFL or IELTS scores, or 2) submitting proof of having graduated from an institution where English was the primary language of instruction (in most cases, your transcripts will suffice). If choosing the latter option, please write to Meghan Hall (hallme@sas.upenn.edu) before submitting your application.

Our TOEFL code is 2986. For the IELTS, the University of Pennsylvania only accepts hard copies of scores, which can be sent by mail to: University of Pennsylvania, Department of English, 3340 Walnut Street, Rm 127, Philadelphia, PA 19104, Attn: Meghan Hall, Graduate Coordinator

Q: Is there a foreign language requirement for admission?

A: No, you do not need to demonstrate proficiency in a language other than English to be eligible for admission. Both our M.A. and Ph.D. students are required to demonstrate reading proficiency in another language (1 for the M.A. / 2 for Ph.D.) over the course of their degrees. This requirement is satisfied through departmental language exams, and summer language courses and undergraduate-level intro courses are available.

Q: My statement of purpose is slightly longer than 1200 words. How fixed is that word limit?

A: For all writing that you submit, do try to observe the word and/or page limits. One goal of the word limit is to force applicants to express themselves as succinctly as possible. This may take you several rounds of revisions, but it is excellent preparation for the demands of a graduate program and of the profession, where the ability to say a lot in a small amount of space is important for fellowship and job applications, project proposals, etc.

Q: Can I submit two papers of 10-12 pages each instead of one 20-page writing sample?

A: You should submit one 20-page writing sample. There is no place in the application to upload a second sample.

Q: Should my writing sample be a self-contained essay or can it be an excerpt of a longer work, such as a master's thesis?

A: While we do accept excerpts of longer works, your writing sample should be able to stand on its own. Samples that contain many condensed or summary sections (ie. "*In this section, I discuss the history of x and y*") or that leave out central arguments that the longer work makes are going to be less compelling than an excerpt that has been shaped into a stand-alone piece.

Your writing sample should be no longer than 20 pages (not including the Works Cited or Bibliography) and should provide an up-to-date portrait of your critical writing and thinking.

Q: When can I expect to hear the results of my application? How are applicants notified?

A: Because each application is reviewed by multiple faculty members, our admissions cycle does take over two months. Decisions are released on a different date each year, but applicants can generally expect to hear by the end of the first week in March, give or take a week. We appreciate your patience while we give each application the focus it deserves.

When decisions are released, you will receive an email notifying you that your decision letter is ready. Please note that the email itself will not contain your decision. To access your decision letter at any time after its release, simply go back to your application in the ApplyWeb portal.

Q: Does the admissions committee interview applicants?

A: The admission committee may use interviews in the last stages of their decision making to help evaluate applicants' potential for success in the program. Those who are asked to interview will be briefed in advance on the format and length. All interviews will take place over Zoom and will not require travel. Interviews will only be done in the final stages of the admissions process and may not be required every year or in every case.

Q: I already submitted my application but realized that I attached the wrong writing sample file (or transcript, statement of purpose, etc.). Is there a way for me to submit the correct file?

A: Yes, you may submit corrected materials by email attachment to Meghan Hall (hallme@sas.upenn.edu). She will include a hardcopy of your corrected materials with your application.

Q: I am applying to the Master of Arts program. Do I submit an online application through CollegeNet, which is used for Ph.D. applicants, or is there another website for students applying for the M.A. program?

A: Yes, when applying to the M.A. you would complete an online application through CollegeNet. You will indicate on the application form that you're interested in the MA, and your statement of purpose should clearly indicate that you are interested in the MA program.

Q: If I am accepted to the M.A. program, can I continue on with the Ph.D. program upon completion of the master's?

A: No, there is no track between our M.A. and Ph.D. programs. To be considered for the Ph.D. after you get your M.A., you would need to reapply and be accepted into the program.

Q: I would like to be considered for the terminal M.A. as well as the Ph.D. Do I need to submit a separate application?

A: No, you should not submit a separate application. Please indicate in your statement of purpose that you would like to be considered for the terminal M.A. as well as the Ph.D., and please notify our Graduate Coordinator, Meghan Hall (hallme@sas.upenn.edu), so that she can put a note in your application.

Q: What funding is available for Ph.D. students and are there opportunities to work as a TA, Research Assistant, etc.?

A: All accepted Ph.D. students, regardless of citizenship, are provided with 5 years of guaranteed funding, which covers tuition, fees, and health insurance, and provides students with a generous stipend paid out over 10 months. Students who stay for a 6th year, which is common in our discipline, compete for fellowships and teaching opportunities to support their final year.

Additional work is discouraged in the first 2 to 3 years of the program, when coursework and exam schedules take up much of the student's time, unless the work is aligned with the student's research interests and professional goals. Students in the dissertation phase of the program can take advantage of additional teaching, grading, and research work to supplement their stipend or to fund their summers. All additional work must be approved by the graduate chair.

Q: Are either the M.A. or Ph.D. programs available to take online? Will I need to live in Philadelphia while attending the program?

A: No, we do not offer an online version of the program. Admitted students are expected to be "in residence" (living in Philadelphia or within commuting distance) for at least the coursework years and while taking the Dissertation Workshop and teaching. While some students do elect in later years to move elsewhere, they must make satisfactory arrangements with their committee as to how and when they will meet to discuss their progress. Students living at large should continue to contribute to department culture through attendance of major in-person events, virtual attendance in working groups, etc.

Q: Are either the M.A. or Ph.D. programs available to take part-time?

A: No, we only accept full-time graduate students at this time.

Q: I was not admitted this year. Can the department give me feedback on my application so that I can improve?

A: Unfortunately, we are unable to provide feedback on individual applications. This is a matter of feasibility, not a matter of principle.

Q: Who has access to my application and data?

A: Once submitted, your application is accessible to Penn English faculty, including members of the graduate admissions committee, the AD of Graduate Studies, admissions staff of the Graduate Division of Arts and Sciences, and the Grad Dean. The following measures are taken to protect applicant privacy:

1. Printing or downloading applications is strictly prohibited prior to an applicant's admission to the program.
2. Applications are stored and subsequently archived securely in ApplyWeb's application portal.
3. No additional materials generated during the admissions process are maintained after the admissions season has ended.

Don't see your question? Email our Graduate Coordinator, Meghan Hall, at hallme@sas.upenn.edu.

Source URL (modified on October 20, 2023):
https://www.english.upenn.edu/graduate/admissions/faq