WHY AN MFA?

“There are a variety of reasons for pursuing an MFA—the desire for a concentrated period of time to write, the need for feedback on a specific work-in-progress, and the search for expert guidance on issues of craft and technique among them. One common reason is the desire to teach creative writing: An MFA is a terminal degree, which means that it better qualifies you to teach at the university level.”
http://www.pw.org/content/mfa_programs?cmt_all=1

Other Questions to Ask:

• What are the offerings of each school’s MFA?
• What kinds of writing does your school support?
• What kind of funding does the school offer?
• Consider additional funding through the department’s scholarship and summer or intersession teaching opportunities, too.
• How intimate do you want your experience to be?
• How many classes do you want to take, or how much time do you want to write?
• What are your chances of getting in?
• How much does school prestige matter to you?
• Where are you willing to live?
https://affordingthemfa.wordpress.com/2015/08/10/school-selection-questions-to-ask/

Who will look at my application?

Admission committees are often made up of the graduate program’s professors, administrators, and admissions department representatives.

How are decisions made?

For MFA applications, your writing portfolio is the most important part and the first thing many admissions committees look at.

Give us your best now, don’t worry about your best in the future.

Every artist at every stage has doubts before they share their work.

“Just begin. Just take the first step in the direction of what calls to you. Everything flows from the action we take. One step today, another tomorrow.” Cat Bennett

Bennett, Cat. (2013) Making art a practice: 30 ways to paint a pipe [how to be the artist you are]. Scotland, UK. Findhorn Press.

CHOOSING A PROGRAM

Why are you going to graduate school?

Ask yourself what is the most important aspect of graduate school to you. Is it the professors, name recognition, location, facilities, coursework, philosophy or maybe the visiting writers?

Ask for advice.

Compare philosophies.

Ask to talk to professors. Research them.

Research recent graduate’s work.

Low or High Residency? Lots of input or a hands-off approach?

Visit the program to talk to students.

Again after all this research ask yourself what is important to you and in the end, trust your gut!

What if I’m planning on switching writing styles or genre?

Apply with the best work you have now and if you have work in your new style and genre then include it. Many programs will allow you to some flexibility in switching focus after acceptance. This is a great question to ask during the application process.

What if I’m rejected?

It isn’t personal. You are in good company. Every writer worries about this because you care. It is hard to put yourself out there and this is a normal reaction. Programs could be looking to create a wide range of styles in their program and already has accepted someone similar to you.

“The world may linger a step behind true creative vision but art is still leading us forward in many ways we can’t fully see yet. Rejection may also mean our work needs refining. We need to be open to this. We’re all growing as artists. We can cultivate detachment, listen with care, use what resonates with us, and carry on. We can appreciate that others are willing to look and share our journey to one degree or another.” Cat Bennett

Bennett, Cat. (2013) Making art a practice: 30 ways to paint a pipe [how to be the artist you are]. Scotland, UK. Findhorn Press.

How do I build my portfolio?

Don’t feel pressured to create portfolio-worthy writing, as this might stunt your creative flow. Enjoy writing and trying new things. When it comes time to apply, review your work and choose the best of what you’ve written. Ask for help and a second person to read through your work. More is not necessarily better.
Can I put in fewer or a couple more pages into my portfolio?
Most importantly always defer to the instructions of each individual institution. Don’t ‘pad’ your application, only include your absolute best work.

SAMPLE APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS:
Manuscript: 20–30 double-spaced pages for fiction; 10–20 double-spaced pages for poetry
Online application
Statement of purpose: The first line should state desired Specialty Area in the English department
Three letters of recommendation
Official transcripts
$50 application fee

Manuscript: up to 40 double-spaced pages for fiction; 10 poems for poetry
Online application
Three letters of recommendation
Personal statement: 2–4 pages addressing why you write and/or why you’re choosing to pursue an MFA in creative writing, what you hope to do at this institution (and beyond), and why this creative writing program is the place for you.
Official transcripts
Optional GRE scores (Institution: 3087)
$80 application fee

Manuscript: 15–20 double-spaced pages for fiction; 10–12 poems for poetry
Online application
Statement of objectives (500–750 words)
Three letters of recommendation
Official copy of transcripts
Current resume highlighting any publications, awards, fellowships, or relevant writing/teaching experience
General GRE scores (Institution: 004586) optional
$60 application fee

IN THE END…
• Be aware of due dates and plan plenty of time for postage and for technical uploading glitches.
• Look in to the formatting of your application.
• Edit, edit and re-read again. Ask for help and a second set of eyes!
• Don’t be discouraged if you don’t get in the first go around!

For more information or to discuss graduate school options other than an MFA, contact Lindsay Coats at careerservices@nhia.edu to make an appointment.