



What is English 500?

ENGL 500 is the two-unit culminating experience course required for all MA students: those in the Composition, Rhetoric and Professional Writing (CRPW) MA¹ and those in the English MA.

How will I fulfill English 500?

- › CRPW students will complete a thesis for ENGL 500.
- › English MA students will complete a comprehensive exam, which is in the form of a portfolio.

What are the prerequisites for ENGL 500?

Enrollment in ENGL 500 requires the following:

- › You must have an approved Advancement to Candidacy on file with the Office of Graduate Studies (you should submit your Advancement to Candidacy application, an OnBase form, no later than one semester prior to enrolling in ENGL 500).
- › You must either have completed, or be in the process of completing, all graduate coursework during the semester in which you are or intend to be enrolled in ENGL 500.
- › You should have no more than one grade of Incomplete on your transcript.

How do I enroll in ENGL 500?

To enroll in ENGL 500, you must first obtain permission from the English Graduate Coordinator, who will review your eligibility. Permission is obtained by submitting a “Permission to Enroll in 500” form to the Department. Once you submit the form, it will be routed first to your thesis advisors for their electronic signatures (if you are writing a thesis) and then to the Graduate Coordinator. Once the Graduate Coordinator approves your form, the Department staff will enroll you in ENGL 500. **Note:** You cannot self-enroll in ENGL 500.

CRPW MA students: Please submit the “[Permission to Enroll in 500—Thesis](#)” form together with the following documents:

1. A thesis contract, signed by two faculty advisors. Your first reader will furnish you with the contract, which sets out the expectations for completion of the thesis.
2. A prospectus. You should work out with your first reader how long the thesis prospectus should be and of what, precisely, it should be composed. The guidelines set by your first reader for the prospectus should appear in the thesis contract.

¹ Note that admissions to the CRPW MA (not the CRPW MA itself) are being temporarily suspended as of Fall 2026, due to a shortage of CRPW faculty; the English Department plans to resume the program when it is able to hire enough faculty to run it. Therefore, the information in this document concerning the CRPW MA applies only to current CRPW students.

3. An unofficial copy of your CSUS transcript.

English MA students: Please submit the "[Permission to Enroll in 500—Exam](#)" form together with an unofficial copy of your CSUS transcript.

I am writing a thesis for ENGL 500. How do I find a first and second reader?

If you will be writing a thesis for ENGL 500, you must first arrange a thesis committee, consisting of two faculty advisors. To locate thesis advisors, consider those faculty with whom you have taken courses and whose research and teaching interests align with your topic and methodology. You may also wish to consult the program coordinator for your discipline. Please note that thesis advising is an overload duty for which instructors receive no additional compensation, and that your preferred advisor may not be available to serve on your thesis committee. Please also keep in mind that advisors typically are not available when the University is not in session. You should begin seeking out advisors early in the program, and no later than one semester prior to your planned enrollment in ENGL 500.

Reminder: All CRPW students will write a thesis for ENGL 500.

What is the nature of the English MA comprehensive exam?

The English MA comprehensive exam consists of a three-part portfolio designed to demonstrate an advanced synthesis of graduate study, professional readiness and disciplinary awareness. Students will submit (1) a reflective essay articulating their methodological and theoretical commitments in relation to their coursework and future practice, (2) a fully developed college-level syllabus that translates their literary expertise into effective pedagogy, and (3) an essay situating a revised seminar paper within the field of scholarly publication through analysis of appropriate peer-reviewed journals. The portfolio is completed independently, evaluated holistically by a faculty committee and assessed as No Pass, Pass, or High Pass.

How many times can I take the comprehensive exam?

In accordance with University policy, students may attempt the exam a maximum of two times. Students who fail the exam on the first attempt may attempt it one additional time only.

How long does it take to complete ENGL 500?

Most students taking the comprehensive exam complete ENGL 500 in a single semester. Students writing a thesis typically require more than one semester to finish.

Once you enroll in ENGL 500, the University requires that you maintain continuous enrollment until your 500 requirement is complete. After one semester of ENGL 500, those students who receive a grade of RP (reasonable progress) can enroll in ENGL 599 (Continuous Enrollment) *at a reduced fee*, instead of re-registering for ENGL 500. Students enrolled in ENGL 599 may not enroll in any other courses. After three sequential semesters enrolled in ENGL 599, a student must re-enroll in ENGL 500. To see current fees and apply for continuous enrollment, please visit the OGS form website [here](#). If you are writing a thesis, you must consult with your advisors as to your completion timeline before enrolling in ENGL 599. Your thesis advisors may not be available to continue working with you if you extend your thesis completion date.

Are there any other administrative to-dos when I am enrolled in ENGL 500?

The semester you plan to graduate, you must file a [Graduation Application](#) with the Office of Graduate Studies. If you have previously completed a Graduation Application and your graduation date has changed, you must submit a [Graduation Date Change form](#) to the OGS. If you were admitted as a conditionally classified student, and you have not already done so, you must file a [Classification](#)

[Application](#), requesting full classification as a graduate student. Finally, all students whose coursework (including the culminating experience) has deviated from the information provided in the Advancement to Candidacy application must complete a [Petition for Exception form](#), in which you will specify what deviations have occurred. Please consult with the Graduate Coordinator before you complete the Petition for Exception form. Finally, all students who intend to graduate in a given semester must complete an [OGS Culminating Experience Workshop](#). Consult the OGS website for deadlines; note that deadlines are typically early in the semester.

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