

# The Use of Creative Research Methods for the Thesis

## Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto

### **Principles, Practices, Guidelines –**

### for Current Students, Faculty and Committee Members

#### INTRODUCTION

The option for students with an established creative practice to include Creative Research methods among others in the doctoral thesis was established at the Centre in 2019. As posted on the Centre's [website](#), the mandate of Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto is to engage in theoretically informed research that not only crosses linguistic and cultural divisions but also works across media and disciplines. Our PhD program thus supports projects involving creative research methods that engage with critical inquiry and investigation at the doctoral level.

Applicants should signal their interest in this option and indicate the preparation they have for it in the letter of intent accompanying their application to the PhD program. An advisory committee of faculty with expertise in creative research methods will review the application. This committee will be available to discuss the plan with the student before the end of the first year of the PhD, in order to provide support for developing a feasible project. Students who have chosen to pursue this creative research option will produce a dissertation that incorporates a creative process (work of art, performance, film, play, text, etc.) as one of the investigative methods. Their supervisory committee will include at least one member of the university community working in the relevant field of creative practice.

From conception, through qualifying exam and proposal defence, oral defence, and final dissertation, students choosing this option are encouraged to think about ways to dynamically integrate creative processes or projects into their research methodologies. Much as a conventional dissertation contains research of publishable quality, the thesis project involving research creation methods must meet academic expectations and the standards of disciplinary or artistic rigour in the sphere(s) in which they operate.

Creative research is defined with reference to the “Research Creation” approach to research that combines creative and academic research practices and supports the development of knowledge and innovation through artistic expression, scholarly investigation, and experimentation. The relation between the creation process and the research activity should be put into question and produce critically informed work. This definition of Research Creation is taken from [Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council](#).

## 1. THE SUITABILITY OF INCLUDING CREATIVE RESEARCH METHODS IN A PROPOSED THESIS PROJECT IS ASSESSED AT TIME OF ADMISSION

The feasibility of including Creative Research as one of the methods in a proposed thesis project will be assessed at the time of admission to the doctoral program.

The Admissions committee will solicit reviews of an applicant's file from faculty outside the Centre as needed to determine: a) whether the applicant has a sufficiently established creative practice to justify the projected use of Creative Research methods, and b) whether we have adequate supervisory capacity for the proposed project. At least one member of the supervisory committee will be expected to have expertise in the creative practice to be used by the student. The applicant seeking to use Creative Research methods will, like all other applicants, be expected to show other preparation for success in our program's course work and ability to satisfy all program requirements.

The student who applied with an intent to use Creative Research methods in the thesis will be expected to employ the creative practice assessed at the time of admission.

The Centre does not provide studio or performance space.

Students admitted with the intent to use Creative Research methods will comprise up to approximately a quarter of the doctoral students enrolled at any given time. We will continue to strive for a balance of fields and methods in thesis projects corresponding broadly to the range of interests and supervisory capacity of faculty at the Centre.

## 2. GUIDANCE PROVIDED IN YEARS ONE AND TWO

The Creative Research Committee and the Executive Committee of the Centre (Director and Associate Director) will meet with students who were admitted with the intent to use Creative Research methods, typically in the winter term of year one of their program, to discuss the principles and guidelines for development of their thesis project proposals.

The projected incorporation of Creative Research method should be discussed explicitly with prospective supervisory committee members prior to the establishment of the supervisory committee in year two. One member of the supervisory committee will have expertise in the creative practice to be employed as one method in the thesis. The Field Paper and Field Exam program requirements will address, among other questions, the relevance of the anticipated Creative Research and its relation to other methods for advancing new knowledge within the fields addressed.

## 3. CREATIVE RESEARCH IS ONE RESEARCH METHOD AMONG OTHERS

Our program differs from an MFA program: we do not evaluate creative work as a product of doctoral study.

Instead, as stated on our website: “The mandate of Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto is to engage in theoretically informed research that not only crosses linguistic and cultural divisions but also works across media and disciplines. Our PhD program thus supports projects involving creative research methods that engage with critical inquiry and investigation at the doctoral level.” The thesis incorporating Creative Research should present theoretically informed and solidly grounded comparative inquiry that is similar in level and rigour to that found in theses in the program that do not include Creative Research methods.

#### 4. THE THESIS WILL COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE SUPERVISORY AND FINAL ORAL EXAM (FOE) COMMITTEES

In line with graduate Degree-Level Expectations from the Office of the Vice-Provost, Academic Programs, the thesis will be one that “communicate[s] complex and/or ambiguous ideas, issues and conclusions clearly and effectively” (<https://www.vpacademic.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/225/2018/11/dle-grad.pdf>).

It is expected that the members of the supervisory and FOE committee will *not* all be experts in the creative practice employed. The thesis must, therefore, be written so that all committee members can form a judgment of the thesis and examination. Guidelines from the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) state that the thesis must:

- Demonstrate how the research makes an original contribution by advancing knowledge in the field(s)
- Show a thorough familiarity with the field(s) and an ability to critically analyze the relevant literature
- Display a mastery of research methods and their application
- Offer a complete and systematic account of the candidate’s scholarly work
- Present the results and analysis of the candidate’s original research
- Document sources and supports claims
- Locate the candidate’s work within the broader field or discipline
- Write in a style that respects the norms of academic and scholarly communication

(From “Key Criteria for the Doctoral Thesis,” <https://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/current-students/program-completion/producing-your-thesis/doctoral-thesis-guidelines/>).

On Supervision and Final Oral Exams, see also <https://sgs.calendar.utoronto.ca/general-regulations#8>.

#### 5. INCORPORATION OF CREATIVE ELEMENTS AND MULTIPLE MODES IN THE THESIS

All doctoral theses must contain a written component. The Centre’s PhD program outcomes refer to the thesis as a “a book-length comparative inquiry.” SGS regulations specify the following: “A thesis should have a coherent topic with an introduction presenting the general theme of the research and a conclusion summarizing and integrating the major findings. The collection of

papers may be expanded or supplemented by unpublished material, scholarly notes, and necessary appendices. In all theses, pagination should be continuous; there should be a common table of contents and an integrated bibliography for the whole thesis. A thesis must be prepared in a standard format (see [National Library guidelines and Guidelines for the Preparation of Theses](#)).” (Section 12.1.2.8 “Thesis,” <https://sgs.calendar.utoronto.ca/degree-regulations#12> )

Other elements reflecting creative research methods may be included in addition to the written text. These other elements may be embedded as illustration or appended to the thesis. The guidelines for multimodal theses should be observed generally for theses that feature Creative Research methods: “the creative element should be integrated into the theoretical context in order to show explicitly how the thesis, as a whole, leads to new insights and contributions. In all other respects, the thesis must conform to the same standards required for all doctoral theses. It should make an original contribution to knowledge, demonstrate appropriate research methods and training, and be worthy of publication in whole or in part.”

## 6. DETERMINATION OF THESIS STRUCTURE

Bearing in mind that outcomes of the creative process are not evaluated on their own, the student and supervisory committee will have discretion to determine the thesis structure that best corresponds to the needs of a given project and meets the thesis criteria specified above.

As the SGS Guidelines for the Doctoral Thesis state: “The decision about the structure and format of the student’s doctoral thesis should be made by the supervisor and the supervisory committee members and be informed by the practices in Comparative Literature and the student’s academic and professional goals. In some fields, the decision about structure and format is relatively easy to make while in others the decision requires careful consideration from all involved parties.” (<https://www.sgs.utoronto.ca/current-students/program-completion/producing-your-thesis/doctoral-thesis-guidelines/student-guidelines-for-the-doctoral-thesis/> )

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