AN INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH AT UTSC

Contents

Key Contacts p. 2
Organizations, Publications, and Award Opportunities p. 3-4
Important Resources p. 5-6
Exploring English Programs: Expectations and Requirements p. 7-10
Routes & Threads Through the English Program p. 11-14
Foundational Glossary p. 15-20
Charting English Literature, Pre-1900 p. 21

UTSC ENGLISH

www.utsc.utoronto.ca/engdept

LITERATURE WRITING FILM
KEY CONTACTS

English Department Website: www.utsc.utoronto.ca/engdept
The website has lots of information about studying in our department, as well as ongoing and upcoming events, contact information for faculty, and other resources.

Departmental Assistant: Arthus Bihis
Office: HW 427 Email: english-da@utsc.utoronto.ca
Arthus is likely the person you’ll see if you need to submit a late assignment (bring it to his office before 5pm for a time stamp) or if you need to find a particular professor’s office or office hours. He can also direct you if you’re not sure who you should talk to about any departmental issues.

Undergraduate Assistant: Sean Ramrattan
Office: HW 426 Email: ramrattan@utsc.utoronto.ca
Sean will likely be your first port of call for any program advising help, including questions about enrollment, pre-requisites, and other class timetabling issues. He can also help you figure out your next best step for who to speak with if he doesn’t have the answer. Please check the sign on his office door for student drop-in hours.

Department Chair: Prof. Katie Larson
Office: HW 322 Email: english-chair@utsc.utoronto.ca
As Chair, Professor Larson is responsible for the overall work and vision of the department. She is always happy to meet with students — to book an appointment, please contact her assistant, Gail Naraine, in H331A (or via email at gnaraine@utsc.utoronto.ca).

Associate Chair & Program Supervisor: Prof. Neal Dolan
Office: HW 317 Email: english-associate-chair@utsc.utoronto.ca
Professor Dolan is responsible for overseeing the English specialist, major, and minor programs, and he can help you with program-related concerns including issues such as transfer credits, requirements, and navigating your degree, along with general student advising. He is also responsible for the department’s undergraduate curriculum as a whole.

Creative Writing Supervisor: Prof. Daniel Tysdal
Office: HW 317A Email: dtysdal@utsc.utoronto.ca
Professor Tysdal is the head of the Creative Writing minor and your primary contact for questions about our writing program.

Lit & Film Studies Supervisor: Prof. Garry Leonard
Office: HW 334 Email: leonard@utsc.utoronto.ca
Professor Leonard is the head of the Literature and Film Studies minor and your primary contact for questions about our film studies program.

If you have questions about any aspect of studying in our department — from choosing classes to strategizing for what life can offer those with an English degree — you should consider visiting your professor’s office hours. We are happy to talk about issues that extend beyond an individual course or semester.
ORGANIZATIONS, PUBLICATIONS, AND AWARD OPPORTUNITIES

Students of English Literature & Film (SELF)
Website: www.utsc.utoronto.ca/engdept/self-students-english-literature-and-film
Email: self.utsc@gmail.com
Office: HW 335

Students of English Literature and Film (SELF) at UTSC is a student-run organization that works in close partnership with the English faculty to build a community of English Literature and Film students by providing student services, organizing academic and social events, and bringing student feedback and issues to the UTSC Administration. Through our events, we also promote professional, scholarly, and research excellence among our fellow students. Our full members have complete access to these events and all the services that our organization provides. We always have opportunities open for involvement throughout the year; so find your SELF and join us! Events are open to English and non-English majors alike! SELF can also be found on Facebook at /UTSCSELF and Twitter @UTSCSELF

Sigma Tau Delta
Contact: Prof. Maria Assif (Office: HW 319, Email: massif@utsc.utoronto.ca)

The English Department at UTSC is the only Canadian chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honor Society. A member of the Association of College Honor Societies, it was founded in 1924 at Dakota Wesleyan University. The Society strives to: confer distinction for high achievement in English language and literature in undergraduate, graduate, and professional studies; provide, through its local chapters, cultural stimulation on college campuses and promote interest in literature and the English language in surrounding communities; foster all aspects of the discipline of English, including literature, language, and writing; promote exemplary character and good fellowship among its members; offer its members opportunities for scholarships, internships, conference participation, and publication both in creative and critical writing; exhibit high standards of academic excellence; and serve society by fostering literacy.

Scarborough Fair
Website: www.scarborough-fair.ca

Scarborough Fair is the oldest campus literary magazine in Canada, and publishes an annual edition of creative literature of all kinds — poetry, fiction, nonfiction, art, photography, and beyond. The deadline for submissions is usually in December, and each year Scarborough Fair is also looking for executive and editorial teams (usually at the end of the Spring semester). Further information can be found on their website and via social media. Scarborough Fair can also be found on Facebook at /scarfairmag

The Scarborough Review
Website: http://thescarboroughreview.wordpress.com
Email: reviewthescarborough@gmail.com
Student Co-Executive Editors: Leru Xu and Zabrina Bobadilla

The Scarborough Review is our campus publication for undergraduate critical essays in English and the humanities. Previous issues and publication information can be found on their website, where you can also apply to be an editor.
Annual English Undergraduate Conference
Contacts: Prof. Maria Assif (conference organizer; massif@utsc.utoronto.ca), Prof. Daniel Tysdal (creative writing; dtysdal@utsc.utoronto.ca)

Our undergraduate conference is held every Winter term, with submissions accepted in December or January (keep an eye out for announcements online and in class, as well as posters advertising the submission process and theme for the year). The conference is an important, unique opportunity for you to share your ideas with your peers and professors, and an excellent chance to get a glimpse of what English literature looks like as a professional discipline (should you be interested in graduate school or even a future career in the field). The conference covers both academic essays as well as creative writing pieces (fiction, poetry, and nonfiction), and submissions are welcome from any current UTSC student. Each year awards are given (including a cash prize) to the best critical and creative works.

You can check the Department website (in the Events Section) for previous conference programs and updates about this year’s conference.

Award Opportunities
Aside from the awards offered each year through the Undergraduate Conference, there are other major prizes offered for work in English literature:

Best Essay Prize (English)
This award is open to any essay written for a UTSC English course over the academic year (2017-18). Nominations are accepted from faculty or directly from students, and the deadline is mid-May.
Contact: Gail Naraine (gnaraine@utsc.utoronto.ca)

Essay Prize in Canadian Studies
This award goes to an essay on a topic focusing on Canadian art, drama, music, or literature, and the essay must have been written over the course of the academic year (2017-18). Nominations are accepted from faculty or directly from students, and the deadline is mid-May.
Contact: Gail Naraine (gnaraine@utsc.utoronto.ca)

Best Essay in Film Studies
This award is for the best piece written in film studies, whether a film analysis, an essay engaging with film theory, or even a film review written for a course. Nominations are accepted from faculty or directly from students, and the deadline is mid-May.
Contact: Gail Naraine (gnaraine@utsc.utoronto.ca)

Annual Creative Writing Contest
Submissions welcome in poetry, short fiction, and creative nonfiction. Submission deadline is typically late Fall, and winners are published in the Scarborough Fair spring issue.
Contact: Daniel Tysdal (dtysdal@utsc.utoronto.ca) or Andrew Westoll (awestoll@utsc.utoronto.ca)

Jasun Singh Memorial Prize in Creative Writing
This prize is awarded to one student enrolled in Creative Writing who best demonstrates excellence in technique, creativity in approach and bravery of vision. The value of the scholarship is $2,000.
Contact: Daniel Tysdal (dtysdal@utsc.utoronto.ca) or Andrew Westoll (awestoll@utsc.utoronto.ca)
**Important Resources**

**University and Campus Resources**

The University of Toronto and the UTSC campus have an enormous wealth of resources at your disposal. We cannot include all of them here, but we would like to point you to a few that may be particularly useful to you.

**The Writing Centre**  
Location: AC 210  
Website: [http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/twc/](http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/twc/)  
The Writing Centre is a multifaceted resource for helping you craft any and all writing assignments, from understanding the assignment instructions to appropriate researching (and avoiding plagiarism) to writing techniques to reviewing and revising for submission to understanding your prof’s feedback and figuring out how to improve. The Writing Centre is best used ahead of time — don’t wait until the last minute to book your appointment.

**The English Language Development Centre**  
Location: AC 310  
Website: [http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/eld/](http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/eld/)  
The ELDC offers support of all kinds for any students who are looking to improve their use of English at the university level, and their services are not meant only for non-native speakers — even if you are fluent in English, you might benefit from the programs and resources offered by the ELDC. In particular, you may be interested in using their Academic English Health Check, a quick computer-based assessment of your language skills: [https://utsc.utoronto.ca/eld/academic-english-health-check-aehc](https://utsc.utoronto.ca/eld/academic-english-health-check-aehc)

**The UTSC Library (Bladen)**  
Website: [http://utsc.library.utoronto.ca](http://utsc.library.utoronto.ca)  
English Liaison Librarian: Chad Crichton  
Email: ccrichton@utsc.utoronto.ca  
The library is where you go for books, obviously, but perhaps less obviously it is a resource you can access for help and advice of all kinds, from researching to technology to course-specific research guides to group study rooms.

**AccessAbility Services**  
Location: SW 302  
Website: [http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~ability/](http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~ability/)  
The mandate of UTSC’s AccessAbility is to provide support and accommodations for students with disabilities (whether physical, sensory, learning, or mental health) and other medical conditions.

**Health and Wellness Centre**  
Location: SL 270  
Website: [http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/hwc/](http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/hwc/)  
You can find help, guidance, and resources of all different kinds at the Health & Wellness Centre. Their mission is to help our campus and our community feel better and be better.
Internet and Print Resources

For help in researching and writing your assignments (e.g., bibliographies, proposals, lit reviews, and essays), our Liaison Librarian, Chad Crichton, has set up a Research Guide specifically for English courses that you might find a good jumping-off place: http://guides.library.utoronto.ca/utsc_english

Courses in the English department use MLA conventions for citation and essay format. The current MLA Handbook will be a valuable resource throughout your degree, and we recommend either purchasing a copy of the Handbook or getting familiar with its location in the UofT Library: http://go.utlib.ca/cat/10277098

The standard and best dictionary for working in English literature is the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), which can be accessed directly whenever you are on a UofT network at www.oed.com, or can be accessed through the library website when off-campus: http://go.utlib.ca/cat/8323833

Oxford Reference is a searchable digitized collection of scholarly reference works in a wide range of subjects, for when you need a definition or explanation of a period, term, theory, or author (among many other options). As with the OED, it can be accessed directly from a UofT network (www.oxfordreference.com) or through the library website when off-campus: http://go.utlib.ca/cat/9873644

Two of the most common databases for scholarly journal articles in English literature are:

- MLA International Bibliography: http://go.utlib.ca/cat/7911838
- JSTOR: http://go.utlib.ca/cat/7911781

Plagiarism — which is representing the ideas and words of someone else as your own — is a serious offense in any English course. We strongly recommend that you familiarize yourself with the concerns of Academic Integrity as expressed in UofT’s Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters, and that you fortify yourself with strategies for understanding, recognizing, and avoiding plagiarism before you find yourself in a precarious position. There are many resources for learning the skills that will help you avoid any problems with Academic Integrity, including everything from proper citation to effective time management.

- University of Toronto’s Academic Integrity guide: http://academicintegrity.utoronto.ca
- Citing Sources and Creating a Bibliography: http://guides.library.utoronto.ca/citing

The Writing Centre, the UTSC Library, and your professors will all have tips and tricks for effective researching — remember that you don’t have to go it alone, and that the sooner you seek help and advice, the better it will serve you.
The discipline of English at UTSC explores the rich variety of texts produced in English (and in translation) around world, crossing historical periods and geographical boundaries. Encompassing creative writing, film studies, and literature, our curriculum encourages students to think and write critically about the development of particular genres, the relationship between literary works and other art forms, and the production and dissemination of texts in different historical and cultural contexts. The English program at UTSC gives students the tools to engage with new ways of thinking, speaking, and writing about the world around them and, in so doing, to interact with and to change that world through critical language and argument.

The English department offers five different programs, and each has a different path through course requirements: Specialist, Major, and Minor in English; Minor in Creative Writing; and Minor in Literature and Film Studies. (More detailed explanations can be found on the English Department Website, [www.utsc.utoronto.ca/engdept/programs](http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/engdept/programs))

When planning your degree path, please be aware that not all English Department courses are offered every semester or even every year. Many courses are on a one- or two-year rotation cycle, depending on faculty availability and other scheduling concerns. If there is a course you are especially interested in, we encourage you to speak to the appropriate Program Director (for English, Film Studies, or Creative Writing) to get a sense of when and how often that course might be offered.
Exploring English Programs
English courses are offered at the A, B, C, and D levels:

- **A-level** courses at UTSC introduce students to the study of English at the university level. ENGA10 and ENGA11 are designed both for students wanting an introductory course in the Specialist, Major, or Minor Program in English and for students having a general interest in literature and film and in particular their development in relation to the twentieth century.

- **B-level** courses have no prerequisites and are available both to beginning and to more advanced students. ENGB03, ENGB04, ENGB05, ENGB27, and ENGB28 are pre-requisites for certain paths, and we recommend embarking on them as soon as possible if they are required for your chosen program.

- **C-level** courses, as their prerequisites indicate, are designed to build upon previous work and presuppose some background in critical skills and some familiarity with the subject matter.

- **D-level** courses provide opportunities for more sophisticated study and require some independent work on the part of the student. These courses are generally restricted in enrolment and focus on seminar discussion.

Students are advised to check the prerequisites for C- and D-level courses when planning their individual programs, and to consult with the Program Supervisor before taking courses on other campuses.

Students planning to pursue graduate studies in English are advised to include ENGC15 among their elective courses and to consider enrolling in ENGD98, an intensive seminar that provides qualified students with the opportunity to develop a senior essay project under the supervision of a faculty member in English. The Program Supervisor is available by appointment to advise students selecting courses with graduate study in mind.

---

*Exploring English Programs*

*English Department Faculty & Staff* August 2017: Let us know how we can help you find your way.
The following categories offer a broad orientation to English as a discipline and suggest some of our department’s core areas of strength. They can be a guide for selecting related courses and they also highlight some of the possible routes and threads you might choose to follow. It’s important to keep in mind that these categories are not mutually exclusive, and that we encourage each of you to develop thematic routes and threads through the program that reflect your own interests. Feel free to talk to your professors about their suggestions as well.

Further details on the various route groupings, including specific links to courses and the UTSC Calendar, are available on the English Department Website: http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/engdept/routes-and-threads-through-english-program
FOUNDATIONAL GLOSSARY

This glossary is meant to introduce you to some of the terms and concepts that occur most frequently when discussing English literature as a scholarly field. The list of words is by no means complete, and each entry has a more complex (and sometimes confusing or even contradictory) set of denotations and connotations than what we can convey here — please treat this glossary as a jumping-off point, rather than as an end resource.

Notice that many of the references here come from resources at your disposal: The OED and OxfordReference.com (see pg. 6 of this guide).

text
The text is whatever item is under consideration for analysis and interpretation. In our discipline, it can be almost anything at all: you might automatically think of a novel, play, or poem, but texts can also be comic strips, television shows, advertisements, political speeches, video games, historical documents, etc.

Note: we call it “reading” a text even if it’s not engaging specifically with printed words.

context
Every text is situated within a context, meaning its frame of reference (such as the historical era when it was written) or a particular set of circumstances (for instance, the environment in which the text is read).

intertextuality
Intertextuality is “the sum of relationships between and among writings” and “usually covers the range of ways in which one ‘text’ may respond to, allude to, derive from, mimic, parody, or adapt another.” (From the Oxford Companion to English Literature, 7th ed.) Many critical schools take intertextuality as an unavoidable fact of literary production — basically, that any work of art is made up of associations with other works of arts, whether intentional or not.

form
The shape a text takes. For instance, a novel is a different “container” for an idea than a sonnet would be, and a music video is a different form than a two-hour Hollywood film. In English, we like to say that “form reflects content, and content reflects form.” Essentially it means that the shape of a story will affect the story itself, and that certain kinds of stories will fit better into certain shapes.

Note: Confusingly, “form” and “genre” can be used interchangeably in some circumstances. It’s annoying, but we haven’t really figured out a better system yet.

genre
A genre is a categorization for a text. There are broad categories (such as poetry, prose, and drama), as well as numerous “subgenres” (e.g., within the larger category “novel” there are divisions such as “romance novel” and “sci-fi novel”; within film you’ll see designations such as “film noir” and “buddy cop movie”; Shakespeare’s plays typically fall into the genres “comedy,” “tragedy,” and “history”).

poetry
Poetry is a “Composition in verse or some comparable patterned arrangement of language in which the expression of feelings and ideas is given intensity by the use of distinctive style and rhythm; the art of such a composition.” (OED) Poetry is also called “verse.”
**Prose**
Prose is often defined as writing which is not poetry: “Language in the form in which it is typically written (or spoken), usually characterized as having no deliberate metrical structure (in contrast with verse or poetry).” *(OED)*
Fiction and nonfiction are two main categories of prose writing.

**Drama**
Drama can be poetry or prose or a combination of the two; its main distinction is that it is fundamentally about *performance*: “A composition in prose or verse, adapted to be acted upon a stage, in which a story is related by means of dialogue and action, and is represented with accompanying gesture, costume, and scenery, as in real life; a play.” *(OED)*

**Film, cinema**
Film refers to any motion picture (a series of images edited together and then projected) of any length. Film can also refer to the whole field and/or industry of motion pictures, though “cinema” is also frequently used to suggest the whole category of filmmaking, distribution, and consumption.

**Critical thinking**
Critical thinking is one of the primary skills — if not the primary skill — that we aim to cultivate in the study of English literature. The *Oxford Dictionary of English* defines it as “the objective analysis and evaluation of an issue in order to form a judgement.” To think critically is to be an active rather than passive participant in knowledge; it is the ability to question, investigate, decide, and argue.

**Close reading**
This is the mechanism by which most of the analysis and argumentation in English works. Essentially, close reading means a careful, focused, intensive examination of a piece of text in order to produce a detailed analysis. In other words, when you’re close reading you’re not just absorbing “what’s happening here,” but investigating “what’s interesting here.”

**Perspective**
Perspective is the position from which someone is looking at a thing — it is a point of view. In analyzing texts, there are numerous different perspectives to consider: the author or director has a perspective, as does the narrator or speaker (or in film, the camera), the characters, and the reader.

**Interpretation**
To interpret a text is to offer an explanation or argument about its significance or meaning. Interpretation is different than summary or synopsis, particularly in the sense that there is no single, “correct” interpretation of a text, but a multitude of different meanings produced depending on the interpreter’s perspective, context, and intent. The way an interpretation “works” is if it can be supported with specific evidence and sound logic.

**Thesis, thesis statement**
As an English student, you will typically want to turn a good interpretation into a thesis, or the single unifying argument that drives an academic essay. The thesis is what you are ultimately trying to prove to your reader in regard to a text or texts (or an author or some other topic), and its clearest, one- to two-sentence expression is referred to as the “thesis statement.”

Pro Tip: In any essay that you are writing or any work of criticism that you are reading, you should always be able to identify the specific thesis by underlining or highlighting it.
authority
Although it is a word obviously closely related to “author,” in contemporary literary studies we do not recognize the author as the only (or even the main) authority on a text. Authority is a form of power, and is located in various and sometimes competing sources. The important thing is that we are able to recognize and analyze authority (for instance, where it comes from, and whether it is legitimate or illegitimate).

theory, literary theory
Literary theory (sometimes referred to simply as “theory”) is a specific approach or “lens” used when looking at a text; it is a philosophical framework that often (but not always) suggests a worldview as well as a way of reading. “Literary theorists analyze the language, structure, or function of the text, often in relation to the culture in which that text circulates. Theorists may also assess the aesthetic, social, political, ethical, or economic value of a text for particular groups. There are always multiple perspectives on what texts are and what they mean; hence it is important to recognize that there is not just one literary theory but many theories that overlap, complement, or contradict one another.” (Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature)

(literary) criticism
The words “theory” and “criticism” are very often used interchangeably, though the latter is more accurately the application or putting into practice of a particular literary theory. Criticism is what is produced when a critic analyzes a text (or author or era, etc.) using a theoretical perspective or perspectives.

canon
A canon (often “the canon”) is “a body of approved works, comprising either (i) writings genuinely considered to be those of a given author; or (ii) writings considered to represent the best standards of a given literary tradition.” (Oxford Companion to English Literature, 7th ed.) For instance, the canon for English literature includes extremely well-known authors such as Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, and James Joyce. In contemporary scholarship, “canon” can be a problematic term, and is often the starting point for a discussion about authority, representation, and marginalization.

Pro Tip: A canon is not the same thing as a cannon — though, indeed, they are both instruments of great power and can be used in destructive ways.

media
At its most basic, media is the plural form of medium, which means “The means or agency through which communication takes place” (A Dictionary of Media and Communication, 2nd ed.), and thus is similar to “form.” In literary discourse you might find media to have extra layers of meaning depending on context — for instance, it could refer to “The main means of mass communication, esp. newspapers, radio, and television, regarded collectively; the reporters, journalists, etc., working for organizations engaged in such communication” (OED) or perhaps it is used to emphasize the importance of the material shape of the text, as in Marshall McLuhan’s famous statement that “The medium is the message.”

realism
Realism is “a mode of writing that gives the impression of recording or ‘reflecting’ faithfully an actual way of life. The term refers, sometimes confusingly, both to a literary method based on detailed accuracy of description (i.e. verisimilitude) and to a more general attitude that rejects idealization, escapism, and other extravagant qualities of romance in favour of recognizing soberly the actual problems of life.” (Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms)

Note: If a text is described as being “realist,” it means it reflects a particular philosophy of art known as “realism” — it does not simply mean that the text is “realistic.” This is a tricky distinction, and might take some getting used to. Luckily, we have courses that are partially or wholly devoted to what “realism” means, including ENGC91: American Realisms, and either or both of the Victorian novel courses (ENGC21 and ENGC22).
gender, gendering (gendered)
Generally speaking, English literature recognizes gender as distinct from sex — the latter is the biological division into male and female, while the former is a collection of behaviours and mannerisms that are socially constructed and enforced, and which signal “woman” / “feminine” and “man” / “masculine.” Part of this process is “gendering,” or “The sociohistorical process in which particular cultural forms come to be associated more with one sex than the other within a culture, generating gender connotations and playing a significant part in the construction of gender.” (A Dictionary of Media and Communication, 2nd ed.) For instance, pink does not automatically or naturally belong to women, but has been gendered to be strongly associated with the feminine.

Note: As a binary mode of thinking, gender is often a site of inquiry and investigation in our discipline, and not taken for granted. The rise in awareness around transgender and other non-binary identities is an example of this attitude.

queer, queer theory
The term “queer” has a history of use as a slur or derogatory term, and we want to clarify that no one in an English classroom would ever use it with that intent. Rather, we use queer as a designation for a school of thought (and a way of reading) known as “queer theory,” developed throughout the 1980s and 1990s by critics such as Michel Foucault, Eve Sedgwick, and Judith Butler. In this sense, queer is a broad, inclusive term that indicates any and all sexualities which are not normative (i.e., heterosexual/straight).

Other, Othering (Othered)
When you hear us refer to “the Other” or “Othering,” you might want to try hearing it with a capital letter; because we are talking about something beyond simply that other item over there, not this one. The Other in literary theory and discourse suggests a deep (and sometimes unexamined) belief in the difference between a person who is not considered “one of us.” The OED says the Other is “that which is not the self or subject; that which lies outside or is excluded from the group with which one identifies oneself” and is “[n]ow usually opposed to self.” Like gender, this is not an inherent, objective, or natural distinction but a pervasive and powerful construction: certain people and groups have been Othered by social and cultural forces. Identity categories like gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and religion are often subject to Othering.

indigenous
Indigenous is “A term to define cultures deriving from or rooted in a particular land or place. The term especially refers to those peoples with significant ancestral and spiritual relations to lands later colonized as settler societies.” (A Dictionary of Human Geography) For instance, indigenous in the Canadian context would cover both the First Nations people as well as the Inuit people. Aboriginal is a frequent synonym for indigenous, and in Canada this designation also covers Métis people (whose lineage is shared between indigenous people and European settlers).

postcolonial
Postcolonial refers to the political, cultural, and social circumstances in countries and regions that are or were once colonized (typically by European nations, though not exclusively so). It is a complex term, however; and “[r]ather than simply being the writing which ‘came after’ empire, postcolonial literature might be broadly defined as that which critically or subversively scrutinizes the colonial relationship, and offers a reshaping or rewriting of the dominant meanings pertaining to race, authority, space, and identity prevalent under colonial and decolonizing conditions.” (Oxford Companion to English Literature, 7th ed.)

diaspora, diasporic
Although the term initially referred to the spread of Jewish people beyond the historical lands of Israel / Palestine, diaspora is now used to designate any group of people who have spread beyond their original (or traditional) geographical region. An interest in diasporic literature and art frequently involves a consideration of topics such as globalization, migration, physical territory, and ethnic and national identities.
The entries below are historical terms that are commonly used in our discipline. The historical survey courses “Charting Literary History” (ENGB27 & ENGB28) are the best way to get a handle on these periods, as well as on the concept of periodization (the dividing up of time into historically contingent categories) more generally. You can also refer to the “Charting English Literature” diagram following for more help in keeping the pre-20th century terms straight and locking them into a chronological sequence.

Medieval
This term designates a period of European history, literature, and culture from, roughly, the fall of the Roman empire (c. 5th-6th centuries AD) until the start of the Renaissance (c. 1500 AD). You might see the terms Middle Ages or even “Dark Ages” used synonymously, but Medieval is probably the way you want to go. It is by far the largest period in English literary history by the sheer weight of years, and is full of variety, complexity, and contradiction. Although our interest in English literature makes us gravitate toward the culture and history of the British Isles, the Medieval period necessarily includes major global interactions, including everything from the Crusades to the advent of the age of European exploration and conquest. Medieval authors and texts you might recognize include Chaucer, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (and other Arthurian tales), Everyman, and Beowulf.
Note: Writers from this period wrote in what is known as Old English (a.k.a., Anglo-Saxon; used until the 11th century) and then Middle English (from the 11th to 15th centuries). So no matter how odd the vocabulary and phrasing might seem to you, it is inappropriate to use the term “Old English” for any text written after about 1300.

Early Modern
The Early Modern period covers the era of the European Renaissance, stretching from about 1500 AD until 1700. Renaissance is often used as a synonym for this period, but does not effectively cover the goings-on in North America, during the period of exploration and early colonization by European nations. In looking at British literature in particular, you might see this era subdivided into the Protestant Reformation (from the 1520s), the Tudor period (1485-1603), the Jacobean period (1603-25), and the English Civil Wars (from the 1620s to 1660, centering around the “official” conflict from 1642-49). Other common subdivisions include Elizabethan (under the reign of Elizabeth I, 1558-1603) and Shakespearean (pertaining to the poetic and especially theatrical environment in which Shakespeare worked, during the late 16th and early 17th centuries). Early Modern authors and texts you might recognize include Shakespeare, Milton, John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, and philosophers such as John Locke and Thomas Hobbes.

The Long 18th Century
The Long 18th Century is a way of referring to a historical era (in Britain particularly) that primarily centers on the 18th century but isn’t strictly bound by the years 1700-1800. Depending on who you ask, the Long 18th Century either starts with the Restoration of the British monarchy after the Civil Wars (1660) or with the monarchy change that occurred with the Glorious Revolution (1688). Its end is typically marked with the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. This period covers major political movements, including the American and French Revolutions, as well as dramatic historical and cultural shifts like the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, and the artistic development major forms (the novel) and genres (the Gothic). Authors and texts you might recognize include Daniel Defoe (Robinson Crusoe), Jonathan Swift, Aphra Behn, and Jane Austen.
Note: The last decades of the 1600s are claimed by both the Early Modern period and the Long 18th Century. Unfortunately we don’t have a simple solution to this problem, so just be aware and hang in there.

Romantic, Romanticism
Romanticism was an aesthetic movement that spanned many different art forms (from music to painting to poetry), and was at its height between 1790 and 1830 (in British literature; the movement lingered a bit longer in American literature). “Romanticism may be regarded as the triumph of the values of imaginative spontaneity, visionary originality, wonder, and emotional self-expression over the classical standards of balance, order, restraint, proportion,
and objectivity.” (Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature, 3rd ed.) Some of the most famous Romantic authors include Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Byron, and both Shelleys (Percy and Mary).

Note: The capital letter should help you distinguish between something that is Romantic (in terms of its philosophical or aesthetic approach) and something that is romantic (focused on sensual and erotic love). Confusingly, however, the genre of “romance” in literary history refers not to tales of love, but to tales of fantastic adventures.

The Long 19th Century
Like the Long 18th Century, this designation is a way of extending the period’s boundaries past the easy but artificial dates 1800-1900. The Long 19th Century is usually understood to begin with the French Revolution (1789) and to end with the start of World War I (1914). This era is most closely aligned with British rather than American literature and history, and thus its major sub-periods are linked to monarch names: Georgian (late 18th century to 1830s), Regency (1790s to 1820), Victorian (1837-1901), and Edwardian (the first decade of the 20th century). If you see the term fin de siècle ("end of the century") used, it almost certainly refers to the end of the 19th and start of the 20th century. This period is especially rich in terms of Empire and colonial concerns, industrialization and urbanization, and the rise in literacy that led to a major boom in publishing and readership. In Canada, the Long 19th Century tracks from colonial and pioneer days all the way through Confederation and the early emergence of Canadian nationhood.

Note: The Long 18th and Long 19th Centuries overlap by several decades. This can be a bit awkward — especially because it means that major movements (Romanticism), genres (Gothic), and authors (Jane Austen) fall into both categorizations — but no system of categorization is perfect!

Modernism, modernity
These terms are intrinsically related but not quite synonyms. Sometimes but not always signaled by a capital letter, Modernism (like Romanticism) suggests a particular philosophical and aesthetic stance, in this case tied to the late 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century in Europe and North America; Modernism in literature frequently engages with notions of renewal (“make it new” was a rallying cry from poet Ezra Pound) and rejection (of the standards of artistic representation dominant throughout the 19th century), and is interested in powerful new expressions of self (through sexuality and the body, as well as newly-minted Freudian psychology) and politics (such as the plight of the working classes, most clearly embodied in Marxism and the Communist Revolution of 1917). On the other hand, modernity, typically without the upper case initial, is a more general and ongoing condition, “an intellectual tendency or social perspective characterized by departure from or repudiation of traditional ideas, doctrines, and cultural values in favour of contemporary or radical values and beliefs” (OED).

postmodernism, postmodernity
Although the word “post-modern” suggests that which follows or comes after modernity, it is difficult (and probably impossible) to identify a moment when “modern” stops and the “postmodern” begins. The horrors of the two World Wars (and perhaps especially the technologized atrocities of the Holocaust) are frequently suggested as starting points for the postmodern era, though the student-initiated riots in Paris of May 1968 are also tapped as a major breakpoint, especially in literary theory and criticism. It is relatively certain that our contemporary mode is postmodernity, but what precisely that means is a source of constant debate. “Nevertheless, some general literary features of the period have been identified, such as tendencies to parody, pastiche, scepticism, irony, fatalism, the mixing of ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultural allusions, and an indifference to the redemptive mission of Art as conceived by the modernist pioneers.” (The Oxford Companion to English Literature, 7th ed.)