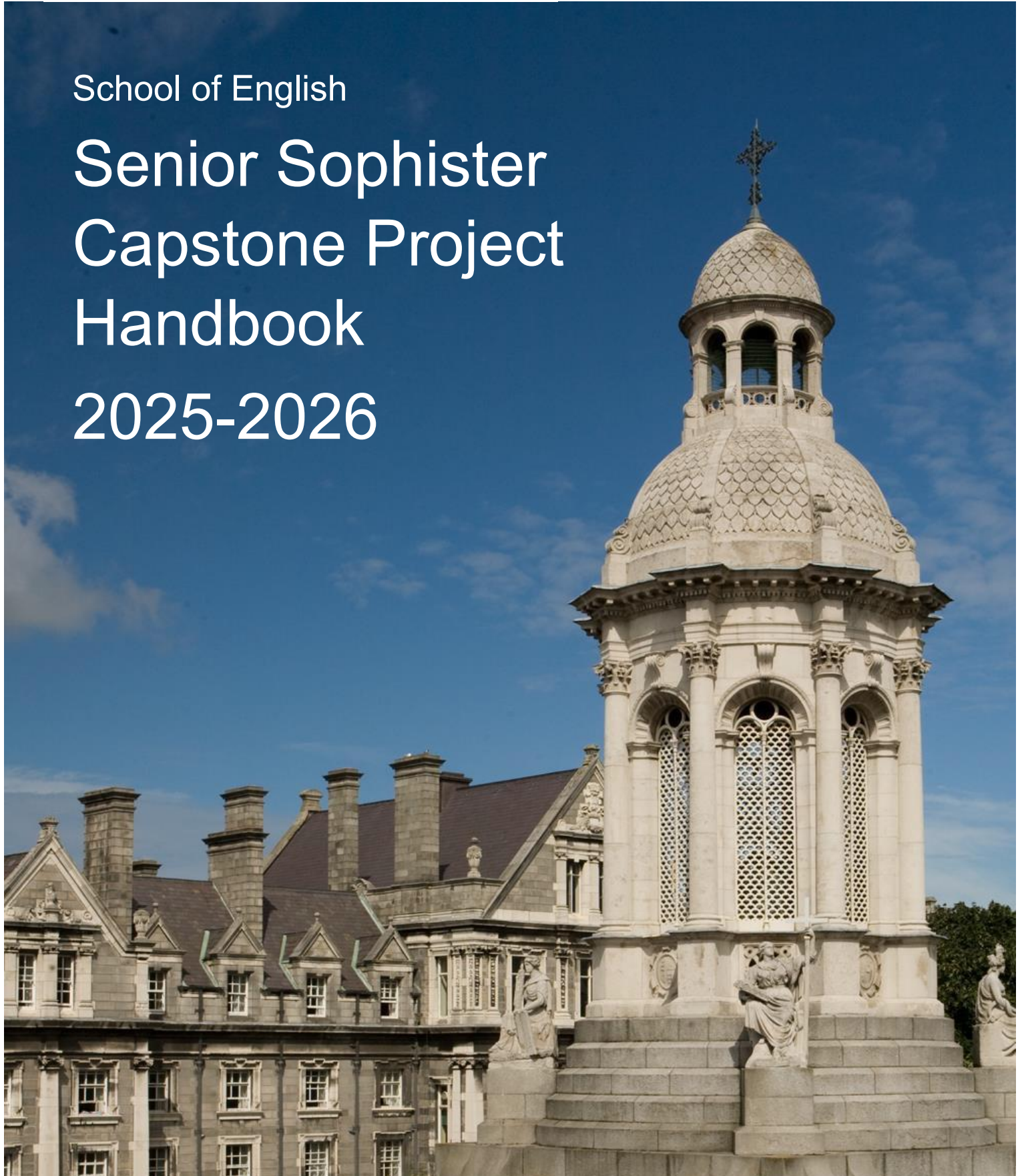




Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

School of English

Senior Sophister Capstone Project Handbook 2025-2026



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1. Compulsory SS Year (Capstone) Projects General Information 2025-26

From September 2017, all Senior Sophisters are required to take a 20-credit module of independent research, referred to in the Trinity Education Project's nomenclature as a capstone project. This constitutes one third of the final year's work; the remaining 40 credits will consist of Sophister options, as has traditionally been the case in the School.

A capstone is a project 'that provides students with an opportunity to integrate the knowledge, skills and competencies which they have acquired during their undergraduate studies, and to demonstrate these in a form appropriate to the discipline'.

For 2025-26 the School of English is offering three models for this 20-credit capstone to its Senior Sophister students. These models are the dissertation model; a creative writing model; and an open collections model, founded on a project based in College archives or special collections in conjunction with the Library.

The three models, outlined below, aim to provide a variety of methods of approach and assessment in the final year project.

The chosen capstone model must be clearly distinct from the other 40 credits being undertaken in your Senior Sophister year and from the modules you took in your Junior Sophister year. You must be careful not to repeat material. So, while you might propose a capstone in an area where you've already done some study in a Sophister option, you must make sure that you're working in a different way with texts, or working on different texts from ones that you worked with in your options.

Capstone Project Contacts:

Capstone Project	Name	Email
Dissertation model capstones	Dr Sinéad Moriarty (Capstone Co-Ordinator)	moriars1@tcd.ie
Creative Writing	Dr Kevin Power	powerk9@tcd.ie
Open Collections	Dr Sinéad Moriarty	moriars1@tcd.ie
Undergraduate Manager	Ms Elaine Maddock	maddocke@tcd.ie

Accessibility and Support:

In the School of English, we are committed to providing and maintaining an inclusive learning environment for all our students. One of the ways we do this is through working closely with the Trinity Disability Service. If you have a disability, a mental health condition, or an ongoing illness or medical condition, the Disability Service is there to support you, and will be happy to discuss your experiences and needs, as well as the learning and assessment accommodations available. For more information, including details on how to register, visit their website (www.tcd.ie/disability) and you can also contact your Tutor, who can advise and assist you. Dr Pádraic Whyte (WHYTEPA@tcd.ie) is the Liaison Officer in

the School of English and the point of contact between the School and the Disability Service: you are also welcome to contact him if you have any queries or concerns.

2. Creative Writing Model

The purpose of the creative project is to allow students to work on a long writing project, which can be a novel, a novella, or stories, or any other form of creative writing for which we can offer supervision in the School. The project will be an original portfolio of either short fiction, or an excerpt from a longer work of fiction, or short stories, or a piece of narrative non-fiction. The project should be viewed as preparation for a first collection of stories, or as the foundation of a novel.

The portfolio may be:

1. FICTION: 10,000-12,000 words of fiction which can take the shape of several short stories, or an excerpt from a longer work-in-progress.
2. NARRATIVE NON-FICTION: 10,000-12,000 words such as memoir, life-writing.
3. POETRY: Students will be asked to write poetry capstones in one of the following two formats: either 280 lines of poetry accompanied by a 1500 word reflection on any aspect of poetic form; or 180 lines of poetry accompanied by a 2500 word reflection on any aspect of poetic form.
4. A FULL-LENGTH PLAY FOR THE STAGE WITH SUPPORTING MATERIALS (as agreed with the supervisor): 10,000 – 12,000 words. The work must be for the stage. Play scripts for radio, television and cinema will not be acceptable.

Fiction, non-fiction, and play assessment: 1 component

A Portfolio of creative writing, word counts as above: 100%; submit Monday week 10 HT 2026

Poetry assessment: 2 components

Either:

1. Poetry (280 lines): 70%; submit Monday week 10 HT 2026.
2. Reflection on any aspect of poetic form (1,500 words): 30%; submit Monday week 10 HT 2026.

Or:

1. Poetry (180 lines): 70%; submit Monday week 10 HT 2026.
2. Reflection on any aspect of poetic form (2,500 words): 30%; submit Monday week 10 HT 2026.

Supervisors:

Creative Writing Capstones are supervised by Mr Eoin McNamee, Dr Kevin Power, Dr Seán Hewitt, Dr Carlo Gébler and Dr Una Mannion. As with the other capstone models, students cannot choose who their supervisor will be, and each project will be assigned to one of the available supervisors.

Assessment:

Assessment (100% assessed): A portfolio of creative writing, word counts as above.

Assessment/grading

Each element will be read, evaluated, and given an agreed mark by two members of the teaching staff. Creative Writing capstones will also be made available for the External Examiners at the School Examination Board.

Timeline:

Week 13 Hilary Term 2025: students should contact their supervisors to initiate their individual research plans. Over the summer you should begin to work on your research materials, as advised by your supervisor.

2025-26 Michaelmas Term (SS year): you will begin submitting work on your portfolio.

The creative writing supervisors may organize a webinar or another group activity for the students doing this capstone model. You will be informed about this by email.

Each student will agree with the supervisor a timeline for production of the portfolio. This should include:

- (a) the drafting of a preliminary outline
- (b) specific deadlines for the completion of individual sections over the course of Michaelmas and Hilary Terms. The number of sections will vary from portfolio to portfolio.
- (c) The portfolio must be submitted by all students no later than noon on Monday of Week 10 of Hilary Term 2026 via Blackboard.

Aims:

The main purposes of this module are:

- to enable students to acquire a deep knowledge of their chosen art form and the work of its most notable practitioners
- to develop their practical and creative skills in a specific genre and to encourage them to take risks in their creative practice
- to enable students to undertake independent research relating to their project

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of their project students will be able to demonstrate a practical and critical knowledge of their chosen field in terms of subject, form, genre, language, narrative, appropriate research, synthesis of materials, and the management and delivery of a substantial, coherent, and original piece of work.

3. The Open Collections Model

The open collections model invites students to engage with College's archival and print collections. Lecturers in the School have identified materials in Early Printed Books (EPB) and the Manuscripts & Archive Research Library (M&ARL) on which they would like to work with students, details of which are shared as part of the application process in the Junior Sophister year. This model of capstone project has a threefold approach, resulting in three assessed pieces: an analytical essay of c. 5,000 words, an account written by students reflecting on their learning process, and a public-facing digital element such as an online exhibition, podcast, blog, or mapping project.

Assessment

1. Analytical essay (5,000 w): students will be required to complete this aspect of the project first. It will take the form of an essay, in which students must articulate why this research project matters and apply appropriate theoretical readings. It is not necessary for the essay to include any consideration of digital humanities. (40%; submit by noon on Monday of week 2 HT 2026);
2. Reflective account of process (no strict word count): students will keep a (physical or digital) project notebook, in which they reflect on their learning process, the technical and intellectual demands of the project, such as copyright or paleography, and will identify the target user(s) of the public-facing digital element. Students will submit entries to their supervisor on 3 occasions (see Timeline below), and the journal will be given an overall mark at the end of the capstone process. (20%; submit by noon on Monday of week 8 HT 2026);
3. Public-facing digital element that will translate the ideas and findings of the essay into a more accessible register and visual format such as online exhibitions; podcasts; blogs; mapping projects, etc. (40%; submit by noon on Monday of week 10 HT 2026).

Please note you must also submit a link to the site to the Undergraduate Office at the same time to maddocke@tcd.ie.

Platform

The platform to be used for these projects is WordPress. Each supervisor will direct the student toward helpful YouTube tutorials for designing WordPress sites, and will flag a number of excellent WordPress / blog sites that the student (and markers) can keep in mind as models. Here are some such sites:

- <https://rylandscollections.wordpress.com/2016/09/08/mapping-the-friends-and-collaborators-of-jeff-nuttall/>
- <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/among-friends-little-magazines-friendship-and-networks>
- <https://rylandscollections.wordpress.com/>
- <http://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/>
- <https://readingmedievalbooks.wordpress.com/>
- Eighteenth-Century Ireland Society: <https://www.ecis.ie/blog/>
- Irish Gothic Journal blog: <https://irishgothichorror.wordpress.com/issues/>
- Horace Walpole at 300: <https://campuspress.yale.edu/walpole300/>

Grading scheme

The analytical essay and reflective journal will be marked following the marking guidelines in the Sophister handbook. We will also follow these guidelines for the public-facing digital element, with these additional considerations:

1. The student will be assessed on how successfully the digital element translates some of the scholarship, research and ideas of the analytical essay into a more accessible register and visual format
2. In the reflective journal, the student will indicate the target user(s) for the digital element – this will be taken into account by the markers.

Assessment/grading

Each element will be read, evaluated, and given an agreed mark by two members of the teaching staff. Open Collection capstones will also be made available for the External Examiners at the School Examination Board.

Copyright considerations

The digital element of all projects will be designed to be public-facing. However, we require that all WordPress sites are password-protected while they are works-in-progress, until they have been marked. Students will reflect on copyright issues as part of their projects, so all projects will ideally become freely available once they are marked, but the password-protection may need to be retained if a finished WordPress site infringes copyright.

Images / Library

Students will identify any photographs or scans of material from EPB or M&ARL to be included in their WordPress sites in good time, and will liaise with the library team to arrange suitable images. Supervisors will encourage students to consider using images that have already been digitised by DRIS (Digital Resources and Imaging Services), and should also ensure that the student knows how to fill in a request form for photographs/scans and assist students as they liaise with the library team to arrange images, but it will be the student's responsibility to complete and submit any such requests.

Timeline

- Week 13 HT 2025: students should contact their supervisors to initiate their individual research plans. Over the summer you should begin to work on your research materials, as advised by your supervisor.
- Students undertaking the open collections model will be required to complete the analytical essay first – they will commence this essay over the summer of 2025.
- Week 2 (Monday) HT 2026 students will be required to submit the 5,000-word analytical essay (40%).
- Week 8 (Monday) HT 2026: students will complete the reflective project notebook in 3 phases and will show their supervisors each of the 3 parts during meetings throughout the year but the notebook is also to be submitted as one document for a final overall mark (20%).
- Week 10 (Monday) HT 2026: completion and submission of public-facing element (40%). Please note you must submit an electronic copy via Blackboard.

Learning Outcomes

This module equips students to:

- Conduct original archival research
- Work both as independent scholars and in a collaborative research group
- Create public-facing digital outputs
- Engage in critical thinking
- Build on skills acquired in traditional assessment models throughout the degree
- Develop transferable archival and digital skills
- Communicate academic insights to the general public

4. The Dissertation Model

The Senior Sophister dissertation is an extended piece of writing of 10,000-12,000 words (broken into 2-4 chapters), based on supervised research. The usual margin allowing the upper limit of the wordcount to be exceeded by up to 10% applies to the dissertations too. This means that the dissertation (including footnotes/endnotes, title, chapter headings, etc. but excluding the bibliography) can be up to 13,200 words long before the penalty for exceeding the wordcount is applied. There is no penalty for a wordcount that is too low but dissertations that are significantly below the 10,000-12,000 word range are not likely to be long enough to provide the amount of detail and depth of analysis expected of this type of project.

The dissertation will normally involve the critical analysis of primary texts, the evaluation of critical or historical context, the application of a critical or theoretical methodology, a literature review or account of sources, and the presentation of a research bibliography. In order to prepare the dissertation, you will work on your own, under the supervision of a member of staff, from the end of your JS year to the submission date in Hilary Term of your Senior Sophister year.

Students choosing the dissertation model meet their supervisor regularly, based on the timeline agreed with the supervisor, building up to submission of the completed dissertation on Monday of Week 10 of Hilary Term in the Senior Sophister year. They should also maintain e-mail contact, as directed by the supervisor. The dissertation option has no taught element, but students choosing this model are required to attend a training session early in the Michaelmas term of their Senior Sophister year, the date for which will be announced by email in Michaelmas term.

The nature of the dissertation and allocation of supervisors:

The dissertation is your own piece of work. The role of the supervisor is to advise on research skills, help refine your ideas, and give feedback on drafts, but the supervisor does not teach you the topic.

All lecturing staff in the School are qualified to provide undergraduate supervision and you may be assigned a supervisor who is not a specialist in the precise topic you have chosen. Assessment/grading

Each dissertation will be read, evaluated, and given an agreed mark by two members of teaching staff. Senior Sophister dissertations will also be made available for the External Examiners at the School Examination Board.

Timeline

Week 13 HT 2025: students should contact their supervisors to initiate their individual research plans. Over the summer you should begin to work on your research materials, as advised by your supervisor.

2025-26 Senior Sophister year MT: you will begin submitting drafts of your dissertation.

Weeks 3-5: There will be one **COMPULSORY** online webinar for the dissertation model and one **COMPULSORY** webinar on using the library e-resources for dissertations. Students will agree with their supervisors a timeline for production of the dissertation. This should include:

- (a) the drafting of a preliminary outline and a working bibliography of primary and secondary sources early in Michaelmas Term of the Senior Sophister year, as well as an agreed -upon critical approach or methodology for the dissertation. **To this end, all students are expected to submit a revised proposal and bibliography to their supervisor no later than the Friday of Week 4 of Michaelmas Term.**
- (b) specific deadlines for the completion of individual sections or chapters in the dissertation over the course of Michaelmas and Hilary Terms. The number of chapters or sections will vary from dissertation to dissertation. All students are required to submit a substantial piece of writing (e.g. one chapter) to their supervisor no later than the end of week 11 of Michaelmas Term.
- (c) the dissertation must be submitted by all students no later than noon on Monday of Week 10 of Hilary Term 2026 to Blackboard.

Each student should arrange to meet in person or online with the supervisor at least twice per term. However, it is likely that more frequent meetings will be necessary.

A possible schedule of work might be as follows (note that this is only an example and not intended to be prescriptive):

- MT Week 1 - meet supervisor, discuss work done over summer, agree structure
- MT Week 4 – submit revised proposal and initial piece of writing (e.g. introduction, detailed plan or other work, as agreed)
- MT Week 11 - submit draft of first full chapter (c. 4,000 words)
- HT Week 1 - submit draft of a second piece of work/chapter for discussion in Week 2 or 3
- HT Week 5 - submit redraft/work for discussion in week 6
- HT Week 8 (Monday) - submit final draft*
- HT Weeks 8-9 – revise and redraft final version
- HT week 10 (Monday) – submit final dissertation

*Please be aware that most staff have multiple students to supervise and will not be able to read drafts from all of them in the weeks immediately before the deadline. In the interests of providing equitable supervision to all students, written work cannot be accepted for feedback any later than 12 noon on the Monday of Week 8 of Hilary Term (i.e., two weeks before the final deadline). This is to ensure a reasonable timeframe for feedback to be provided by staff and taken into consideration by students as they complete their work. While staff will still be available to provide guidance and answer queries, it is important that you plan your work carefully so that you do not end up with an unmanageable workload in the last couple of weeks.

Learning Outcomes

This module equips students to:

- Complete a substantial dissertation based on independent, largely self -directed research
- Work effectively under the guidance of a research supervisor
- Determine the scope and structure of a research project and establish a viable research plan
- Define and articulate their research questions
- Identify and engage with the relevant primary evidence
- Demonstrate independence of thought in evaluating and engaging with secondary literature
- Construct an appropriate and coherent argument
- Present the results of their research in a cogent, scholarly manner.

5. Research Ethics

Trinity's [Policy on Good Research Practice \(2021\)](#) states that

Because of the particular risks associated with certain types of research, ethics approval is required. These include research involving human subjects, their data, the use of human biological material, research on genetically modified organisms, and research conducted on animals In line with IUA research integrity guidelines, College advocates that all research must be planned and carried out with adequate safeguards that protect the welfare and rights of all connected to the research and their data and incorporates the principle of sustainability and sustainable development insofar as possible.

Therefore, if any student wishes to conduct an interview with an author, a publisher, readers etc, as part of their studies, then they must apply for Ethics Approval.

Your Module Coordinator/Supervisor should be contacted in the first instance - they will have access to the relevant form that needs to be completed. Supervisors will offer guidance on how to apply for Ethics Approval and how to fill out the form. If further guidance is required, the supervisor (rather than the student) should contact the Director of Research. Please note that there are specific deadlines throughout the year for the submission of forms. It can take some time to process applications so, please, plan ahead.

Resources:

- [College Policies on Research Ethics](#)
- Data Protection at Trinity: [Trinity's Data Protection Policy and Handbook](#). Official Trinity templates for the required consent forms and PILs can be found [here](#).
- [GDPR training is provided by the Data Protection Office](#) for all those processing or conducting or supervising research involving Personal Data of Participants

6. Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

All capstone students must complete the online tutorial on avoiding plagiarism, 'Ready, Steady, Write', located at:

<https://libguides.tcd.ie/academic-integrity/ready-steady-write>

Please also review the following information on Academic Integrity:

<https://libguides.tcd.ie/academic-integrity>

Full details on the College plagiarism policy can be found in the undergraduate handbook. Please familiarise yourself with this policy before beginning work on your project. This is essential for all of the models outlined here.

7. Presentation

The required format for the dissertation is as follows:

- Cover sheet
- Title page
- Table of contents, including page numbers
- Chapters (each with a chapter title)
- Bibliography or list of works cited

Optional extras include:

- a dedication and/or acknowledgements (which would be inserted on a separate page before the table of contents)
- appendices at the end (if, for instance, you are referring to illustrations or other visual printed material)

Please Note:

- the dissertation should follow referencing conventions outlined in the School of English stylesheet and found here: <https://www.tcd.ie/English/assets/pdf/style-sheet-update-2018-19.pdf>
- the dissertation should be double-line-spaced and presented in a size 12 traditional font such as Calibri, Cambria, or Garamond
- The dissertation must be submitted electronically via Blackboard. Information on how your dissertation will be uploaded will follow nearer to the date of submission.

8. Submission Deadlines and Policies

Submission Deadlines for each model are as follows:

Creative Writing:

All components of the Creative Writing capstone must be submitted on Blackboard no later than **12 noon on Monday 23 March 2026 (Week 10, Hilary Term)**.

Open Collections:

There are three components to the Open Collection Capstone. The submission deadlines are as follows:

- 5000-word analytical essay (40%): **Monday 26 January 2026** (Week 2, Hilary Term).
- Reflective Journal (20%): students will complete the journal in three phases, and will share these sections with their supervisor throughout the year. The complete journal must be submitted no later than **12 noon on Monday 9 March 2026** (Week 8, Hilary Term).
- Public Facing Element (40%): this element must be completed no later than **Monday 23 March 2026** (Week 10, Hilary Term). Students must submit an electronic copy via Blackboard by the same deadline.

Dissertation:

The dissertation must be submitted no later than **12 noon on Monday 23 March 2026 (Week 10, Hilary Term)**.

Extensions Policy

The mechanism for requesting an extension is to contact the Undergraduate Coordinator, Dr Amy Prendergast (PRENDEA1@tcd.ie).

Acceptable reasons for extension requests are:

- Illness: supporting documentation is required, such as a medical certificate or letter from the Disability Service or Counselling Service
- Exceptional personal circumstances: in this instance you need to make a request through your College Tutor

Extension requests will not be considered in relation to clashing deadlines or extra-curricular activities. Except in truly exceptional personal circumstances, extension requests will not be considered on the day of a deadline or be granted retrospectively or be offered on top of prior extensions.

Penalties for Late Submission

An assignment submitted without an extension within seven days of the deadline will automatically have its grade reduced by 10 marks. Once seven days after the deadline have passed, if an extension has not been granted, a fail mark (0) will be returned for the assignment.