The Queen's doctoral program in English comprises scholarly and professional coursework, field examinations, research development, a language requirement, supervisory mentorship and the completion of a dissertation. Candidates for the PhD degree take the equivalent of six graduate half-courses selected with the approval of the department, take a Historical Field Examination and deliver a Special Topic Presentation to the Department.

The degree program is completed by the preparation and presentation for defense of the doctoral thesis. In order to complete the dissertation, students will find it necessary to maintain registration for at least three years.

Candidates for the Ph.D. degree must also demonstrate either basic reading knowledge of two languages or more advanced knowledge of one language other than English. This requirement is a minimum, and additional language training specific to a student's disciplinary field of study may be required by the Graduate Coordinator as advised by the relevant field specialists among graduate faculty. The language requirement may be fulfilled in the following ways: by having completed a basic or more advanced (as appropriate to fulfill the above requirements) full-year university-level language course prior to entry to the Ph.D. program; by passing a written translation test; or by completing, with the approval of the Graduate Coordinator, a basic or more advanced (as appropriate to fulfill the above requirements) full-year language course at Queen's or another university while registered in the program. With approval of the Graduate Coordinator, a Queen's graduate-level language half-course (3.0 credit units), or equivalent at another institution, may also be considered to fulfill one language requirement. This credit cannot be counted among required course credits for the doctoral degree. The languages should be appropriate to the student's area of specialization, and both the languages and courses must be approved by the graduate coordinator.

Students may not register in the Ph.D. program if they have failed to complete all requirements for the M.A. degree. This rule may be waived only in exceptional circumstances with the approval of the Graduate Studies Committee. A student so admitted will not be allowed to register in the second year of the program until completion of the requirements for entry to the Ph.D.