

ENGLISH MAJORS: FINDING OUR NICHE IN THE WORK-PLACE

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You've seen them. They walk among us. They eat our food. They drive our cars. When others rise with the sun, they stay indoors, eyes glued to the magic boxes that contain information. They carry books, clutched desperately to their chests. Their eyes are magnified ten-fold behind thick, horn-rimmed lenses. Their bodies are draped in scores of fabric. Their homes are full of paper; paper on the shelves, paper on the floor, and paper on the desks. They have been here for centuries. They have secret skills you would never imagine. Who are these creatures? They are the misunderstood race of English majors. English majors are stereotyped as bookish, anti-social fanatics. Many people do not realize that English majors carry a wide-ranging repertoire of skills, from effective communication to a deep understanding of the human character. The point of this paper will be to convince the general public that English majors are qualified to work in many diverse fields, and often excel in fields that are not immediately connected to English.

What do we think of when imagining career options for the recently graduated English Major? Much of the time, our thoughts turn to one of these three careers: writing, teaching, and editing. There is a reason that these careers are stereotypical: many people who graduate with an English degree have careers in these areas.

Many people choose to graduate with a degree in English because they enjoy writing and literature. These are the sort of people that can often be found with their nose in a good book. Studying writing and literature is very beneficial; it can prepare the graduate "for a future in law, journalism, graduate studies, and just about anything else" (Princeton Review).

Some of the common careers related to writing that graduates tend to go into are creative writing, technical writing, and journalism. There are, of course, countless options for someone with the desire to write, but these tend to be some of the more popular choices.

There is a lot that can be qualified as creative writing. Someone with an English Degree and emphasis in creative writing could be employed doing anything from writing novels to greeting cards, travel blogs to plays. Because creative writing is more artistic than technical, like any of the arts it can be difficult to break into this field. It can be even more difficult to find a creative writing job that pays well enough to support a family. Rest assured, the jobs are out there for those willing to work for them.

Many creative writers, for example, find that they enjoy careers in advertising. Advertising does involve a lot of business, but English graduates are needed in this area. Advertisers need people to write slogans for billboards, jingles for commercials, and be able to persuade people to purchase products through the power of

words. Creative writers are perfect for these jobs. They have been trained to use the tools of creativity and original thought through course study undertaken by English majors.

Successful creative writers are people who are driven, persistent, persevering, and have a lot of spirit (Donovan). These are the kind of skills and qualities that any employer would be ecstatic to find in their employees. Successful creative writers have been equipped with the keys for success through their study as an English Major.

If creative writing doesn't sound appealing, perhaps technical writing does. After graduation, many English majors choose to enter this field and are very successful financially. Technical writers are often employed by companies to write documents for both technical and non-technical audiences (Docsymmetry). Technical writers often find themselves working for companies writing users manuals, the content for company websites and web pages, and much more.

Because of the content that technical writers are working with, writers are familiar with technology and comfortable working with new software and gadgets. In a world of rapid change and technological advancement, technical writers have the ability to adjust to and embrace change. These skills set them apart from many people in today's workforce, as employees with the ability to adjust to change are needed. Because of these skills, the "demand is greatest for technical writers" (McKay).

One profession that seems to be absolutely necessary in our world is that of journalism. People will always be interested in knowing what is happening around them locally, nationally, and globally. It is important to note that "smart, fair, independent journalism is essential for a democracy to function well" (ThreeSixty). This is the case because journalism is a way of communicating with an entire population. It helps us decide who to vote for, or what to buy at the store. As this is information that people are looking for on a daily basis, one can infer that journalists will always be needed.

In the same way journalists are deemed vital to society, we also thought that newspapers, in print, would always be needed. As our society develops into a more technologically savvy one, however, we find that fewer people are purchasing newspapers. One statistic points out that approximately "120 newspapers in the U.S. have shut down since January 2008" (Chen). However, don't allow that dismal statistic to frighten you. While we move out of an age of printed news, we move towards that of news online. It was noted that "the number of Americans who regularly go online for news...jumped 19% in the last two years; in 2008 alone traffic to the top 50 news sites rose 27%" (Chen).

The reason that interest in journalism has transferred from hard copy to digital is because "audiences now consume news in new ways. They hunt and gather what they want when they want it, use search to comb among destinations and share what they find through a growing network of social media" (Journalism.org).

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There is hope for those types of students who eagerly create their own campus newspaper. The medium has changed, but journalism itself has not. As said above, there will always be a need for journalists to deliver news to the people.

Editing is perhaps one of the largest fields for English majors to enter after graduation. In 2008, there were approximately 130,000 jobs in editing (McKay). Most people, however, do not understand the true importance and necessity of editors. Nearly everything that is published goes through an editor.

The job of an editor is to rearrange sections of the writing so that they are read easier. They can also cut out entire sections or suggest ideas of additions. They do grammar and coherence checks. It is very important to make sure that the writing is correct and smooth before it is published. For this reason, editing is a field which will always be needed. There were approximately 152,000 writers and authors in 2008 (McKay). Imagine those 152,000 writers without their editors—that horrific idea cannot be fathomed.

There are two different types of editors: proofreaders and comprehensive editors. The two are different in the specific work that they do. The proofreader's job is to check for grammatical and logistical errors. Comprehensive editors look more at the flow and content, and determine if large changes should be made to the manuscript (Hewitt).

English majors can decide early in their college career whether they want to be an editor. Once they make that decision, they can decide whether they would be better at proofreading or comprehensive editing. Once that feat is accomplished, they graduate and look for an editing job that allows them to use their carefully cultivated talents to help other writers become successful.

Many English majors also go into the field of education. The educational field will continue to grow and there will always be a demand for teachers. Educators that understand people, are able to think analytically, and have good communication skills are the most effective teachers. There are several different types of teachers and teaching environments.

The most obvious type of teacher is a schoolteacher. Graduates with an English degree can teach at any level, and often teach more subjects than just English. Why do English majors often make good teachers? This quote from the website of North Carolina State University helps to explain it: "Their influence stems from a love of learning; a talent for awakening students to new modes of thinking; an understanding of the human development process; and professional skills." (North Carolina State University).

English majors study literature, and are always looking for deeper meaning and seeing what can be taken away from the book. English majors often have an understanding of people that can be found in the skills for analyzing and piecing bits of information together.

Educators and teachers are also needed for training in the business world. These teachers train people in specific careers after they have graduated and chosen their careers. People with English

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degrees are often asked to provide this training, from one on one training to lecturing entire corporations. Communication skills are, therefore, essential to the teaching careers. English majors are pros at communicating because they have studied linguistics and analyzed various pieces of work, which are documents communicating an idea.

If you are worried about finding a teaching job after graduation, don't fret. If you have a strong spirit and sense of adventure, there are thousands of overseas teaching jobs just waiting to be had. These jobs can be teaching English as a second language to people of all ages, or teaching as an international school in a foreign country to expatriate's children (Studniski & Burnside).

Too often, people think of people with English degrees hiding away in a library somewhere reading old dusty books. While this may be fun for some, many graduates with an English degree choose to work in the spotlight as leaders. According to an article from the University of Kent, graduates with a degree in English are equipped with many skills that can be transferred into leadership careers. Some of these skills include ability to communicate clearly, express ideas and arguments, do research, and gather information (University of Kent). These skills are all key leadership skills, something that every English graduate should have developed during their course of study.

A couple of careers that would require these skills are law and politics. It may not be someone's first thought, but many lawyers studied literature for their first four years. Studying literature and learning to make connections is very helpful when studying law and learning to make connections between different court rulings and one's current case.

Two of the most important weapons in a politician's arsenal are communication and persuasion. How perfect then, that these are two of the skills that English majors are trained in during their course of study. No hiding in dusty libraries for the English graduate, into the spotlight and off to greatness!

Being proactive is one of the most important traits that any recent graduate can have, especially when one's desired career is something that is not typical or expected from people with their degree. That is why it is so necessary to prepare before graduation by doing things that will set graduates apart from their fellow classmates.

Research is not a typical career for English majors, but they are highly qualified because of the work they do while in school. The best preparation for a research career would be to take advantage of research assignments while still in school. Being a good researcher is not something learned over night. It requires practice. School is the time to make mistakes and learn from them, so upon graduation those mistakes are less frequent.

Good communication skills are something that English majors have an abundance of. If one still cannot communicate after taking four years of English classes they may have missed the point of their studies. Communication skills may feel like a small thing, but

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