

Majoring in

English



Inside scoop on:

- What English majors learn
- Course requirements
- Career options
- Next steps

Description of English

What is English?

English is the study of language and literature.

What do English majors study?

English majors acquire understanding of their literary heritage and its relationship to contemporary life. They also develop knowledge of modes of literary expressions and prepare for advanced work in English language and literature.

What skills are important for an English major?

Successful English majors learn to:

- Read diverse texts created in different times and in a variety of voices;
- Think analytically and creatively; and
- Express ideas in an original and organized manner, both orally and in writing.

What else do English majors study?

English is considered a liberal arts major. This means that students take a variety of courses in addition to those required in the major. These courses help develop knowledge and skills that are applied throughout one's lifetime.

Liberal arts courses provide a background to strengthen critical thinking; problem solving; written, oral, and interpersonal communication; quantitative, analytical, and reasoning skills. These skills are considered very important for future success in the workplace. A strong liberal arts background also provides the foundation for an educated person.

Course Requirements

General education: About 60 credit hours of general education courses are required. These courses give a broad range of knowledge in foreign languages, science, math, arts, ethics, civilization, human behavior, and urban environment.

Major courses: A minimum of 36 credit hours of English courses are required. The majority of courses in this major are literature-based; other courses are offered in writing (including creative writing, linguistics, and cultural studies). English majors take courses like:

- African-American literature
- American literature
- British literature of the romantic era
- Chaucer
- Critical approaches to literature
- Feminist literary theory
- Form and theory of fiction
- Form and theory of poetry
- History of the English language
- Linguistics
- Literature of the English renaissance
- Medieval epic and romance
- Shakespeare
- Women writers

English majors may also focus part of their study in a concentration, including: literary studies, writing, criticism and theory, cultural studies, or linguistics.

Electives: About 24 credit hours are required. Many English majors choose to use their electives toward a minor (18-21 credit hours) to give them an additional area of specialization.

Careers in English

The English major provides a good background for entry to any number of occupations. Some of these careers include:

- Administrative assistant
- Advertising coordinator
- Copywriter
- Human resources manager
- Legislative aide
- Loan specialist
- Proofreader
- Publicity coordinator
- Real estate agent
- Reporter or journalist
- Retail manager
- Technical writer
- Textbook sales representative
- Underwriting consultant
- Writer or author

Further training, including graduate school, is required in order to work in these areas:

- Attorney
- College or university administrator
- College student personnel worker
- Elementary or high school English teacher
- English professor
- Librarian
- School counselor
- Social worker

Like most liberal arts majors, an internship may expand the chances of finding a job in a field related to English.

Next Steps

If you are interested in learning more about majoring in English at VCU, consider doing each of the following things. Check them off as you complete each step.

- Check out the VCU English webpage at www.has.vcu.edu/eng.
- Take an introductory literature course.
- Read about the English major in the *Undergraduate Bulletin*.
- Review the English major graduation worksheet with an academic advisor.
- Talk to one or more upper-level English students about their major experience.
- Discuss the major with one or more English professors.
- Go to the Career Center to read about careers in English.
- Go to the VCU bookstore and browse through the English textbook section.
- Explore internship possibilities through the Career Center and the English department.
- Check out the Modern Language Association's (MLA) website at www.mla.org for more information on the study of language and literature.

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