

How to Succeed in the English Major!

Courtesy of the English Undergraduate Association

Getting Oriented

- ★ Wheeler Hall is the home of the English Department. Most everything you'll need will be on the 3rd and 4th floors: the Department Office, your Undergraduate Adviser, and your professors' offices.
- ★ If you have questions about the major, Katie Schramm, the Undergraduate Adviser, is the best person to ask. You can visit her in Wheeler 319, and she can help you declare and plan out your time here. The EUA is also a great resource, and we are always open to answering any questions you might have!
- ★ The English major has 12 required courses that breakdown like this: 6 foundational courses (45A, 45B, 45C, Shakespeare, a Pre-1800, and a Research Seminar) and 6 electives (whichever English classes you like!). To declare you must have at least 30 units, have fulfilled the L&S Reading and Composition Requirement, and have taken 45A OR 45B and one of the following: 45A, 45B, 45C, or Shakespeare.
- ★ The bConnect in English program is a 1 unit course that allows you to meet other people interested in English literature and explore some important themes in the major. bConnect classes meet once every other week for an hour and are very low-key. A variety of events are offered through the program during the course of the semester, such as career panels and professor discussions.

Classes

- ★ Keep your class load manageable. Start off with NO MORE THAN two English classes your first semester. Try to take 1-2 English requirements per semester and keep a balance between requirements and classes you want to take for fun. There is no hurry! Do your research on classes and professors ahead of time. Use ratemyprofessors.com to get a better understanding of the courses. It's not impossible to take more than two classes in the department a semester, and you'll probably want to do that at one point, but just be sure you can handle it.
- ★ Study what interests YOU. If you haven't taken any Eng 45s before, start off with the one you find most interesting. Always check the syllabus/reading list of each class, if available ahead of time, to make sure the texts are ones you'd be interested in reading. Research the courses on the English Department website (english.berkeley.edu) beforehand. The English Department offers various special topic courses that count as electives. Do not be afraid to explore and ask around. It is also a good idea to find a focus among your classes, but it's not necessary. Often they will end up having a similar theme naturally, based on what interests you.
- ★ Don't be afraid to add, drop, and play around, both inside and outside of the department.

Dropping a class isn't a sign of failure, it's just you being realistic about whether or not you really want to slog through all these readings. Adding a class, as long as it isn't full, is usually doable within the first several weeks of school without being too far behind, especially if you're willing to set aside some time to catch up on reading. Most importantly, don't stay committed to a really intense path like double majoring or major/double minoring if there are tons of classes outside of the English department and your other interests that still interest you - don't be afraid to dabble in several fields at once for your non-English requirements.

Reading

- ★ Prioritize your reading! What are the most important texts for a class? Do those first! As you read during the semester, pay special attention to texts you might be using for an upcoming paper. And if you get stuck at a particularly difficult section, try to power through! Don't worry about understanding everything in the text, just be sure to get the general gist of events—professors and GSIs are usually very willing to explain anything confusing, provided that it's clear that you've actually done the readings. If it's a large text, try to focus on one aspect of it that you can talk about in discussion or on a paper.
- ★ Don't play catch up. If you are behind on the reading, keep moving forward! Do the reading for next day's class first and THEN use your weekends or RRR week to catch up on earlier material. This will allow you to avoid falling even further behind.

Participation

- ★ Participate. If you can, talk in section. Why? 1) You'll understand the readings better 2) You'll discover what really interests you (and this helps you decide what to write your papers on) and 3) Section participation points are the easiest points you'll ever earn! Don't worry about the perfect way to phrase something! Sometimes the best conversations arise out of working through a particular phrasing or question. You don't always have to contribute a brilliant point of analysis—simply mentioning a passage or event you found particularly interesting or difficult also contributes to the conversation. And if you're stuck on what to say, try asking questions instead! There are many different ways of showing engagement with the text, so don't feel afraid to try things to see which one works best for you. If you don't feel comfortable speaking up in section, be sure to see your GSI to discuss how to make up those discussion points.

Office Hours

- ★ Go to office hours! Ask for help. Add office hours to your class schedule so you automatically know when they are each week. Go there frequently and ask your professors to clarify parts of the texts you may be confused about. But be sure to be prepared for office hours! If you are going to go talk about *Gulliver's Travels*, make sure

you have read it beforehand. Office hours with your GSI are also essential before turning in a paper. The more you visit your GSI or professor in the office, the better they will know you (for those recommendation letters). By the end of the semester, they will give you that extra nudge when you need it.

Papers

- ★ Papers! Papers! Papers! The best way to get an A on an essay is to start small. Do NOT discuss how the entirety of *Paradise Lost* is a political metaphor. You cannot do it in 5-10 pages. Rather, take a small scene or passage and analyze what you really think is important to talk about. Professors/GSIs love to see microscopic analysis (or what they call “close reading”). Use a smaller passage to make a larger point. It’s the same whether you’re analyzing a three-line poem or a whole novel! If at times your topic seems too small, try arguing against yourself for more perspective. Conversely, if you feel like you’re talking about too much in your paper, don’t be afraid to chop it in half and narrow down your thesis.
- ★ Pick something that interests you to write your papers about. If you’re not invested in your papers, you’ll hate your life every time you try to write one.
- ★ Go to your professor’s office hours 1-2 weeks before a paper is due to (broadly) discuss your paper idea and any questions you might have about it. Go to your GSI’s office hours or make an appointment 1 week before the paper is due to discuss your paper (in more detail). Meeting with your GSI beforehand is VERY important to show you’ve been working on your paper and didn’t just do it the night before. They can also let you know what they’re looking for and help guide you to stay in line with their expectations. GSIs GRADE YOUR PAPERS (for the most part)!

Exams

- ★ The most common English exam format is as follows: a passage ID section, a short answer section, and an essay.
- ★ For the passage ID section, write down the exact passages mentioned in class. They usually will come up again on these tests! (Also, look up and test yourself on famous passages from the texts you read in class, because some professors will test you on these instead of the ones they mentioned in class. You can even make a Google Doc with these passages and study with your friends!) A good study technique for the passage ID section is to make flashcards with the passages on one side and who wrote them, what text the passage is from, and the text’s *significance* in the larger scheme of the course on the other side. It’s not enough to just identify who said it; you have to say why it’s important. Think of this section as a tiny three sentence essay. Also, practice identifying works or authors by their styles, so when you encounter an ID that you don’t recognize, you can at least get some credit by knowing the book or author.

- ★ The short answer section is usually just a longer version of the passage IDs; think of short answers as mini-essays. They give you a chance to expound on the significance of the passage even more than your passage IDs. Write down as much information about the passage, and its place in the story/poem, as you can for each question.
- ★ For your essays, brainstorm some possible prompts and answers to those prompts ahead of time. Professors don't want to trick you; their essay prompts usually ask about major course themes, and if you think about it, you're sure to figure out what those prompts are.

Outside of English

- ★ Get involved/network! You're not just an English major, you're a student and part of a wider Berkeley community. Check out classes in the Film, Rhetoric, and Comparative Literature Departments, or whatever else floats your boat. Think about minoring or double majoring. Expand your network by being part of different clubs or organizations. Expanding your network not only helps once you graduate, but it also helps during your undergraduate career. You never know who might have knowledge of scholarships, literary competitions, internships, research etc. On top of that, you never know when you might need a favor, such as sharing a page or a fundraiser event. Expanding your network allows for success in English classes; having people you know in your English classes allows you to form a study group, which are sometimes *essential* here. As stated before, you never know who might have knowledge you don't have!
- ★ You can petition to count a class that is not in the English department as an English elective! Take advantage of this! All you need to do is fill out a piece of paper available in the English Department Office explaining why this class is relevant to your course of study (and, as English majors, everything is relevant). Write a convincing argument, attach a copy of your course syllabus, and you're good to go! Doing a film, publishing, or other internship? You can also get credit for that! Go see English Department adviser Katie Schramm to petition for credit.
- ★ Find a fun & supportive community within the broader Cal community. Getting involved and building friendships with others is probably the most rewarding part of the college experience. Contribute, engage, and practice self-care.

Classes and Professors We Recommend:

Professor O'Brien: American Poetry Professor
 Professor Hass: Poetry & Shakespeare (former Poet Laureate for the U.S.)
 Professor Briggs: AC requirement (he's funny)
 Professor Otter: English 130A (makes boring things really interesting—satisfies your pre-1800)
 Professor Puckett: English 45s/anything he teaches (dense lectures, but very interesting!)
 Professor Saha: English 138 (amazing class!)
 Professor Serpell: English 166/190 (absolutely brilliant at analysis)
 Professor Falci: English 45C/Contemporary Irish and British Poetry (friendly and enthusiastic)
 Professor Justice: English 45A/anything he teaches (enthusiastic and provides great resources)
 Professor Nolan: Medieval literature (often satisfies pre-1800 and is uber intelligent!)
 Professor Hejinian: Poetry/Contemporary Literature
 Professor Abrams Chandra: Modes of Writing
 Professor Marno: Shakespeare, early modern

Comments or questions? Email us at berkeley.eua@gmail.com or send us a quick message through Facebook: www.facebook.com/berkeleyeua. Our website is also a great general resource: eua.berkeley.edu.

Board Members (We're here to help - please don't hesitate to contact us!):

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