

## English Undergraduate Association's Survival Guide to the English Major

### 1. **Keep your class load manageable.**

Start off with NO MORE THAN 2 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! Taking 2 English classes for more than one semester is okay. Do your research on classes and professors ahead of time. Use [Ratemyprofessors.com](http://Ratemyprofessors.com) or [Ninjacourses.com](http://Ninjacourses.com) to get a better understanding of the course.

### 2. **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 these are texts you'd be interested in reading. Research the courses beforehand. The English department offers various special topic courses that count as electives. Do not be afraid to explore and ask around. ([http://english.berkeley.edu/course/index archive](http://english.berkeley.edu/course/index_archive)) It is also a good idea to find a focus among your classes.

### 3. **Prioritize your reading!**

What are the most important texts for a class? Do those first! As you read, 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.

### 4. **Don't play catch up.**

If you are behind on the reading, keep moving forward! Do the reading for next day's class first — THEN use your weekends or RRR week to catch up on earlier material. This will allow you to avoid falling even further behind.

### 5. **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.**

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And you don't always have to contribute a brilliant point of analysis — simply mentioning a passage or event you found particularly interesting also contributes to the conversation. And if you're stuck on what to say, try asking questions instead! There's many different ways of showing engagement with the text, so don't feel afraid to try many things out to see which one works best for you.

#### **6. 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 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.

#### **7. Papers! Papers! Papers!**

The best way to get an A on an essay is to start small. Do NOT discuss how the entire *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!

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. Get their advice on what they're looking for/have them guide you. GSIs GRADE YOUR PAPERS!

#### **8. Exams! Exams! 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 3 sentence essay.

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.

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.

### **9. Get involved/Network.**

You're not just an English major, you're a student and a part of a wider Berkeley community. Check out classes in the film and rhetoric 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.

Also, 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, sometimes, are very essential here. As stated before, you never know who might have knowledge you don't have!

### **10. You can count Non-English classes as an elective!**

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 Ken Mahru to petition for credit.

### **11. Find a fun & supportive community.**

Try to find a small community within the broader Cal community. Contribute, engage, and practice self-care.

**Classes and Professors:**

Professor O' Brien: American Poetry

Professor Breitwieser: American Literature

Professor Robert Hass: Poetry & Shakespeare

Professor Briggs: AC requirement (he's funny)

Professor Otter: English 130A (makes boring things really interesting — and satisfies your pre-1800 requirement!)

Professor Saul: English 165

Professor Puckett: English 45's

Professor Serpell: English 166/190 (absolutely brilliant at analysis)

Professor Falci: English 45C/Contemporary Irish and British Poetry (extremely friendly and enthusiastic)

*Add your own below!*

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

Make sure to come to our next event, on **Tuesday September 22, 2015 in Wheeler 330**. It's our September social: ***Book Speed Dating!***\*

*\*Come prepared with your favorite author or book. You have sixty seconds to convince an EUA'er why your book is fantastic — and then, they try to convince you. Come meet new people while discovering your new favorite book!*