

An English Major's Guide to Graduation

How to succeed in the classroom and the job market



WKU[®]
Department of
ENGLISH



Choosing a Career Direction

Finding jobs through your interests

An English degree is incredibly adaptable, which can be both good and bad. While your friends may be majoring in degrees that point them down a specific career path, like nursing, architecture, or film production, your degree can apply to any field, making your options feel almost too broad.

The **Strong Interest Inventory Assessment** is a good place to start when you're considering career options. It measures five areas, called **General Occupational Themes**, to judge what careers might work best for you: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. The following descriptions are sourced from careerassessmentsite.com/tests/strong-tests/about-the-strong-interest-inventory/.

Realistic

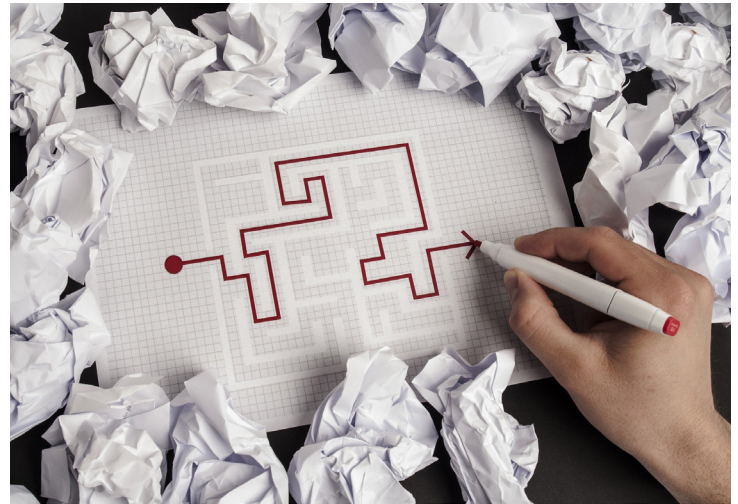
Realistic thinkers prefer to find solutions to concrete problems, seeing the world in clear, black and white terms. They prefer working with data as opposed to abstract issues and research, and they often enjoy working mostly on their own or with a team that has a clear hierarchy of members. You are likely to fit this category if you enjoy physical activity and being adventurous. You might also score high in this category if you enjoy working with technology and specialized tools and programs.

Investigative

Investigative people have a strong scientific and inquiring mind and thrive in academic or research environments. Investigative people enjoy completing more abstract tasks that involve critical thinking, working on experiments or research, accumulating and structuring information, and solving problems. They are independent and are usually more introverted. Investigative individuals tend to work overtime on projects that interest them and spend more time working than they spend on hobbies or with friends.

Artistic

This theme is focused on creativity, often involving art, drama, music, and writing. It is associated with people that have a great need for expression and enjoy creating something at the workplace, whether writing an article or creating visual art for their company. Many also find themselves drawn to being in front of an audience, like acting or playing a musical instrument. Artistic people are very individualistic and are often more comfortable with expressing their emotions. They easily see



the beauty in the world around them. They also prefer adaptable schedules so they can work when they feel most inspired.

Social

This theme revolves around helping, instructing, and care giving. People that score high on the Social theme tend to like working with others and sharing responsibilities. They tend to gravitate to teaching professions and feel comfortable being the center of attention in a group, especially if their work involves helping or nurturing younger people or novices in the subject they specialize in. They are outgoing and talented in sympathizing with and listening to others. They are generous, appreciative, friendly, and often outwardly happy.

Enterprising

People that score high in the Enterprising theme tend to seek positions of leadership and

entrepreneurship. They enjoy working in a group or team-based setting, usually with them leading the way. They tend to be well suited for selling and directing, with a focus on economic success. They also tend to be more comfortable in taking risks to meet their goals and have a competitive nature both in their jobs and in their relationships. They are often described as being energetic and confident with a healthy level of optimism. They are organized and are always aware of the task and goal at hand, while still being adventurous with their ideas.

Conventional

People that score high in the Conventional theme value activities that require organization, detail, and accuracy. They work well in large organizations, but they prefer to work with ideas and data rather than people-oriented tasks. They also prefer a workplace with clear roles and responsibilities for each employee. Those who score high in this theme often enjoy analyzing data, working with style guides, structuring information in an easy-to-read format, and developing rules and guidelines. They are methodical, controlled, and careful both at work and in their personal lives.

The graphic to the right shows a few professions naturally oriented toward each theme. To find a more exhaustive list for your type, click the link below.

Jobs for your Occupational Theme



Realistic

- Technical writer
- Museum Technician
- Engineer
- Law Enforcement Officer
- Parks and Recreation staff



Investigative

- Grant Writer
- Science Editor
- UX Designer
- Psychologist
- University Professor



Artistic

- Broadcast Journalist
- Attorney
- Graphic Designer
- Librarian
- Photographer



Social

- K-12 Teacher
- Workshop Leader
- Academic Counselor
- Scholarship Advisor
- ESL Instructor



Enterprising

- Social Media Marketer
- Content writer
- Curator
- Sales Manager
- Producer
- Small Business Owner



Conventional

- Proofreader/Editor
- Librarian
- Computer Systems Analyst
- Paralegal
- Archivist
- Education Administrator

Figure 1: Jobs for your Occupational Theme

To take the test, visit www.mynextmove.org/explore/ip or go to mynextmove.org, click on "Explore" at the bottom of the page, then select "Discover your Interests" from the menu.

Gaining Marketable Skills

Inside and outside the classroom options for success

There are plenty of ways you can gain extra experience and skills inside and outside your classes to kickstart your career, putting you ahead of other recent graduates.

1. Get an internship.

Internships are a great way to gain work experience while you're still a student. Most require little or no prior work experience and take up 20 hours or less per week, making them a great option for work during the semester.

The Department of English hosts 5-10 internships per semester, which provide credit for *English 369: Internship I*. Internships not hosted by the department may be eligible for class credit with permission of the course instructor.

2. Publish your work.

There are plenty of opportunities for students to publish their writing at WKU, allowing you to build a portfolio and potentially earn some money on the side.

You can write news or short form feature articles for the *College Heights Herald* or long form feature pieces for the *Talisman* magazine and get paid by the article. Information on both can be found at www.wku.edu/studentpublications/.

In the English department, *The Ashen Egg* accepts submissions of academic articles written for class, with a November deadline

each year. *Zephyrus*, the department's fine arts magazine for poetry, short stories, and art, has a submission deadline of mid-February. The department also hosts essay, poetry, and creative writing contests throughout the year. Opportunities to present your work can be found at www.wku.edu/english/shareyourwork.php.

3. Choose your minor wisely.

Having an extra degree of specialization can go a long way in the job market. If you're not sure what career direction you want to strive for, try a minor that complements your strengths and casual interests. Here are a few possibilities:

- If you enjoy advocating for climate issues, try **biology**.
- If you're passionate about racial inequalities, try **African American studies**, **Latin American studies**, **political science**, or **legal studies**.
- If you love learning about different cultures and perspectives, **anthropology**, **folklore**, or **sociology** could be good fits.
- If you like being visually creative, **graphic design**, **animation**, **performing arts**, and **studio art** are all possibilities.



- If you love writing in all forms, minoring in another English concentration or **journalism writing** might be a perfect fit for you.

Your advisor is also happy to point you to a minor that is right for you.

4. Explore electives and Colonnade courses.

Electives within and outside of the English department are a great way to gain marketable skills while being held to class deadlines, especially if you struggle to self-motivate.

A few courses in the language most common in your industry or in the area where you want to work could push your résumé to the top of an employer's list. Proficiency in Microsoft Office Suite and Adobe Creative Cloud programs is also sought after. The courses shown in the chart on the next page fulfill Colonnade requirements and can help you explore a variety of fields that could add to your English career.

This is not an exhaustive list, so remember to check the full course listings for each semester on TopNet to see what else might interest you.

To reach the mandatory 120 credit hours to graduate, you will have room in your schedule for non-major or minor courses that

also don't need to fulfill degree requirements. **Explore as much as possible outside of English** with those courses. You never know what you could end up writing about or what field you could end up working in.

Unusual courses listed on your résumé can also be a great

talking point in an interview and can show an employer that you're open to learning anything. Include these courses in the list of experiences you'll make in the next section, so you can remember to use them on your résumé, especially when they're relevant to the job or the employer.

Course Name	Course Focus	Semesters Offered	Academic Credit
AD 240: Advertising in a Digital World	Design, layout, and typography for preparing advertising and promotional materials for publishing	Every semester	Colonnade K-LG: Local to Global
BIOL 380: Challenges of a Changing Biosphere	Environmental issues from a biological perspective in light of climate change and extinction	Intermittent	Colonnade K-LG: Local to Global Honors section offered
COMM 365: Intercultural Communication	Challenges and opportunities of communication across cultures	Every semester	Colonnade K-SC: Social & Cultural Honors section offered
ENT 312: Entrepreneurship	Identifying opportunities within industries and markets and managing the complex systems that affect innovation	Every semester	Colonnade K-SY: Systems
PJ 131: Intro to Digital Photography	Photo composition, digital camera use, and Adobe photo editing programs	Every semester	Professional Writing elective Colonnade E-AH: Arts & Humanities
PS 220: Judicial Process	Introduction to the American legal system, legal reasoning, and legal resolution of conflicts	Every semester	Colonnade K-SY: Systems
PSY 350: Social Psychology	Discusses the psychology of conformity, group behavior, leadership, intergroup conflict, prejudice, and persuasion	Every semester	Colonnade K-SC: Social & Cultural Honors section offered
PH 447: Human Values and the Health Sciences	Ethical, legal, and social dilemmas confronting the American health care system	Every semester	Colonnade K-SC: Social & Cultural
SOM 310: Media Diversity	Explores news coverage of diversity in terms of race, culture, gender, and sexual orientation	Spring semesters	Colonnade K-SC: Social & Cultural

Figure 2: Courses that teach marketable skills

Creating a Resume

Tips, types, and tweaks for every job

Before looking at job advertisements, it's a good idea to take stock of your experience and skills. Then, you can choose a type of résumé that compliments your skills, tailor your résumé, and get ready to navigate the job market.

Step 1: Make a list.

Since every job you apply to will require different skills and experiences, having one long list of every experience you could put on a résumé will be an asset. This list could include the following:

- **Job experience and internships.** Include the dates you worked at each position and a description of your key responsibilities.
- **Educational experience.** Include your GPA if it is above a 3.5 and list courses you have taken in your major and minor. Don't include required courses like English 100.
- **Student organizations.** Include WKU-approved clubs and campus ministries, how long you have been a member, and any leadership positions you have held.
- **Fraternities/sororities.** Include how long you have been a member and any elected positions you have held.
- **Volunteer service.** Include unpaid service at nonprofits and churches.
- **Hard skills.** Include any measurable skills, such as language proficiency, knowledge of computer programs like Microsoft Office Suite and Adobe Creative Cloud, familiarity with style guides like MLA and APA, etc.



- **Awards and scholarships.** Include academic merit scholarships, department scholarships, and other scholarships won in college.
- **Publications.** List any work published on the internet, including articles written for internships and WKU publications like *The Ashen Egg*, *Zephyrus*, *Talisman*, and *College Heights Herald*.
- **References.** Include supervisors for jobs and internships, your advisor, and professors in your major and minor who you know well, along with their contact information. Only include people who would give you a good reference—if you received a C in a class, that professor isn't the best choice.

This may take a while, but having a list will give you options to pull from when tailoring your résumé.

Step 2: Pick a résumé type.

You may have the perfect work experience to show you're qualified for some jobs you apply for, but for others you may feel like you're struggling to apply what you've done to what you want to do. The two major types of résumés you may use starting out in the job field are **reverse chronological** and **skills-based**. Either type can be designed as a **traditional résumé** or as a **creative résumé**.

A **traditional résumé** is usually one-column, contains no special formatting, and only uses color for headings or special emphasis. It should be used as your default résumé format.

A **creative résumé** uses color, shapes, two column formats, and a variety of more designed elements. It should be used for jobs at creative companies or jobs that require design proficiency. If you aren't sure, take a look at the

company's website design. If the company uses lots of color or a minimalist design, creative is the way to go.

The graphic on this page shows two traditional résumés and one creative résumé, using reverse chronological and skills-based organization patterns. For more information about résumé types, visit Drexel University's Career Center website at drexel.edu/scdc/professional-pointers/application-materials/resumes/.

Step 3: Design without templates.

Templates can be an appealing place to start if you've never made a résumé before. They come pre-set with attractive fonts and organization, taking some of the design work out of the process. However, templates also come with formatting that restricts your ability to make changes to the résumé, like margins that can't be adjusted and font sizes that can't be changed. With these issues, you won't be able to update your résumé easily, meaning you'll have to remake your résumé for every job.

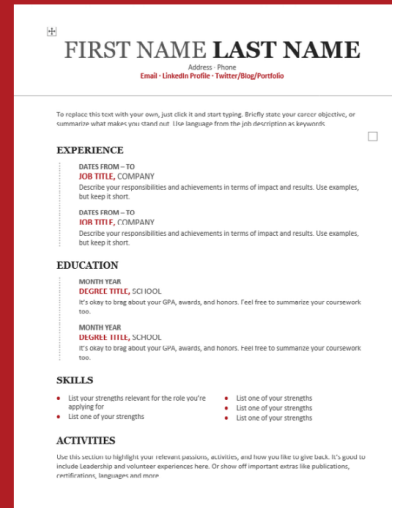
To get around the formatting issues, try finding a template you like in Microsoft Word, then copy-pasting the elements you like, such as fonts and colors, into another Word document. Make sure to use the paste function that allows you to "merge formatting" so you don't end up with the same issues in your new document. This way, you'll have a design basis to start from but still be able to make adjustments that fit your experience.

RÉSUMÉ TYPES

Reverse Chronological

Focuses on job experience, listed from most recent position to least recent. Use this type if:

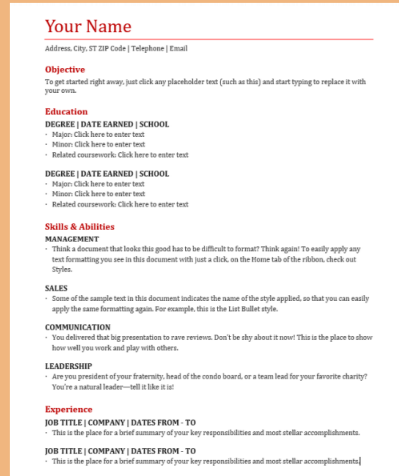
- Your previous jobs involved hard skills you will use in this job.
- You are applying for a job at a more traditional company (i.e. a "9 to 5" workplace).



Skills-Based

Focuses on experience gained across jobs, classes, and other Step 1 list parts. Use this type if:

- Your work experience doesn't directly connect to the job you're applying for.
- You're applying for a creative position (creative writing, graphic design, etc.).
- You chose not to work for some or all of college.



Creative

Uses color, text boxes, shapes, two column formats, and a variety of more designed elements. Use this type if:

- You're applying to a job that requires design proficiency.
- You want to establish yourself as unique and creative.
- The company uses lots of color or a minimalist design on their website.



Figure 3: Résumé Types

Step 4: Tailor your résumé.

Each job or experience you list on your résumé should have 3-4 bullet points below it that explain what you did there and the skills you used to do it. Since you probably had a variety of duties and used a variety of skills at each job, these descriptions are an opportunity to tailor your résumé to the job ad.

To tailor your descriptions, scan the job ad for **key words** that show the primary skills the job involves. Make sure to focus on the job ad as much as possible, instead of highlighting your favorite accomplishments. Does the ad ask for people with teamwork experience? Mention experiences with teamwork at your jobs. Is attention to detail important to the job? Emphasize ways you used that skill.

The figure in the upper righthand corner is the description of responsibilities included in a job

ad with key words highlighted. If you applied for this job, you should emphasize jobs or classes where you used these skills when you pick items from your Step 1 list to include on your résumé, then explain ways you used these skills when you're describing each job or class.

It's important to remember that all of your English classes have given you important skills for every job you'll have. Even if the ad doesn't mention that the company is seeking a good writer, every employer wants a good writer on their team. You've also learned plenty of **soft skills**, skills that don't involve proficiency in styles or programs, while being an English student. Check out the graphic below for soft skills you can incorporate into your résumé.

Step 5: Find honest reviewers.

After you make your résumé, ask someone who is experienced at

- **Edits and proofreads** copy for magazines, books, special interest publications, advertising and marketing projects, and other work as assigned.
- Ensures that all content follows inhouse style and is on-brand, accurate, **grammatically correct, clearly written**, and of valuable to the customer.
- Works in **close collaboration** with editors and art directors to maintain brand integrity and voice.
- Ensures content, format, style, and design elements are consistent and correct. **Checks facts** against source material, doing **independent research** as needed.
- **Supports other departments** as needed with grammar and style questions.

making résumés to review it. They will likely catch errors that are easy to miss and provide tips to make your résumé stronger. To find honest reviewers or to get help starting the process, visit WKU's Advising and Career Development Center at wku.edu/career. You can also visit the Writing Center at wku.edu/writingcenter. Writing Center tutors can help you revise your résumé with your English degree in mind.



Figure 4: Soft Skills for English Majors

Navigating the Job Market

Preparing and searching the smart way

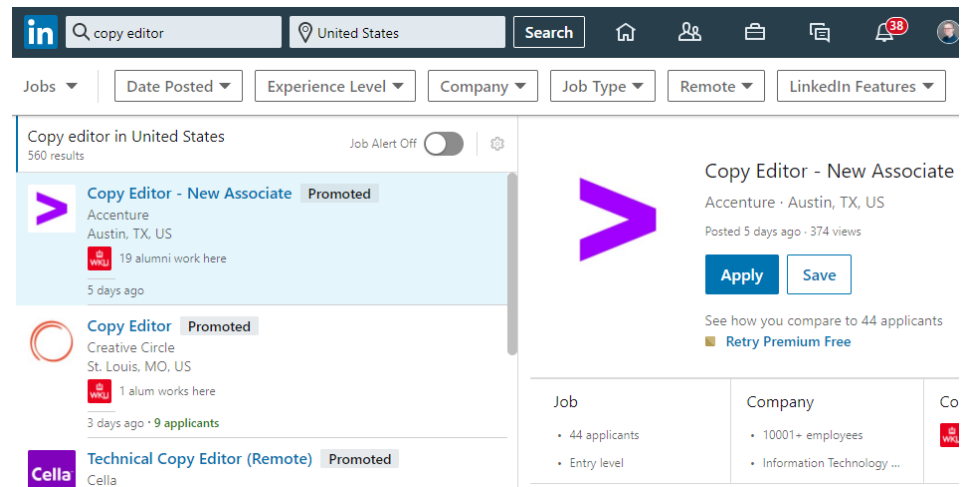
Navigating the job market, especially in the age of online searches and automatic applicant filtering, can be complicated and discouraging for English majors if you don't know how to optimize your application. Here are a few tips for preparing to apply to jobs.

1. Make job board profiles.

Using the résumé you made in the last section, you can easily make profiles on **job boards**, websites like LinkedIn, Handshake, and Indeed that display job openings. Profiles on job boards usually include sections for each item on the list you made in the last section. Most job boards will also have tutorials for setting up your account once you register.

You can search for and apply for jobs on job boards without making a profile on the website. However, having a profile will often allow you to skip the step of submitting a résumé for each job. Building your profile will also allow you to include key words that automatically display how your skills, experience, and education match the company's ad, automatically pushing you to the top of the list of applicants.

WKU partners with Handshake, a job board specifically targeted to college students, allowing you to use your NetID to log in and automatically transferring information about your degree and GPA to save you time when setting up your account.



Handshake also allows you to search for jobs that specifically request English majors.

2. Make a portfolio.

For English majors, one of the most important elements of a job application is often a **portfolio** of your work. A portfolio includes papers, articles, or creative writing you have had published, plus PDFs of papers or projects created for classes that you're proud of. Most job boards will have a place for you to upload your portfolio to your profile. Even if an employer doesn't view your portfolio straight from your profile, creating this portfolio will save time in the future, since you'll already have it assembled for jobs that require you to submit one.

2. Search smart.

Some companies will post their job openings on their own websites, but most will advertise openings on LinkedIn, Handshake, Google, and Indeed. When you're searching on these websites

based on the job title you want, make sure to use **search filters**. This will prevent you from getting discouraged by jobs ads that don't fit your skillset, locations you can live in, or hours you want to work.

Search filters will allow you to search by job location or remote work, full or part time positions, experience level, salary, benefits, and other criteria that will narrow the job ads you see. Select all the criteria you need before you look at ads, and you'll have a much easier time finding the right job for you.

3. Set your social media accounts to private.

If you use your accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media websites only for personal connections, set them to private. Most employers will research you at some point in the process of deciding whether you're a good fit for the job, so setting all accounts to private is a smart and safe move.

Alumni Advice

Learning from Department of English graduates



Alayna Milby, Literature, Class of 2014

Milby is currently the Director of Community Engagement for Hope Harbor, a non-profit crisis counseling center for sexual abuse victims, their families, and their friends. She found her job while volunteering with the organization after graduation. "My passion for this work is what made me stand out," Milby said.

Most of Milby's coworkers majored in social work or psychology. Milby believes that her experiences in literature give her a fresh perspective in her work. "I think [my major] had a huge impact on my ability to empathize with people and especially marginalized groups.

"I will defend English and the humanities because that really created my ability to recognize that people's experiences create who they are."



Lyndsey Pender, Professional Writing, Class of 2015

Pender is a Research and Evaluation Specialist at The Works, Inc., a community development corporation focused on housing, economic development, education, and advocacy. English was the perfect connection between her love of reading and passion for public health.

"I spend so much time writing, whether it's creating an evaluation plan, drafting a report, or creating questions for a survey or interview. My degree is extremely helpful, and I'm consistently looking for ways to practice and hone my skills.

"Internships and fellowships are so important, and they can really help to set you apart when entering the job market. Take advantage of as many of these opportunities as you can."



Brandon Colvin, Creative Writing, Class of 2010

Colvin is an assistant professor in the School of Mass Communication at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Colvin has already produced two feature-length films and the award-winning short film "Great Light" (2018). Colvin believes that his current career path is almost exactly what he envisioned when he was a student at WKU.

"Develop relationships with your professors. The only limit to your education is your own curiosity, and professors love nurturing precocious students.

"1) Search for people who support you and your ambitions. Latch onto them. 2) Take stock of the resources available to you. Figure out the most interesting, challenging thing you could do with those resources. Go do it. 3) Repeat those steps over and over for the rest of your life."



Mara Farmer, EST, Class of 2016

Farmer teaches English and literacy at George Rogers Clark High School. She obtained her Master of Library Sciences degree from University of Kentucky and hopes to become a school librarian. She also used her last semester at WKU to student teach in England.

"I felt a calling to share my love for reading and literature and all of that with young people. I was really impressed with Western's teaching program. I didn't even apply anywhere else.

"Savor the time that you're having in college. It's a really unique experience to live in a place where you're surrounded by creative and open-minded people and you can read and write together and talk about big issues and be intellectually challenged."



Teresa Witcher, M.A. English, 2014

Witcher is a Senior Scholar Advisor in Indiana University's Office of International Services. She also advised international students at Iowa State University and taught English to students in Busan, South Korea.

In her time at WKU, she became involved in gender and women's studies. Her thesis at WKU focused on the need for LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum in ESL classes, and she also advocates for the Green Dot program that discusses violence prevention and intervention on college campuses.

Witcher believes all students should explore as many different areas of study as possible. She is a firm believer that this not only makes you a more rounded person, but it can help you in ways you may not understand or even know about yet.



Sara Volpi, M.A. English, Class of 2014

Volpi is the Kentucky Book Festival Director and Special Projects Coordinator for Kentucky Humanities, a nonprofit that promotes civic engagement and literacy by celebrating Kentucky culture and heritage.

At WKU, Volpi tutored students in WKU's Writing Center and taught English 100 courses as a Graduate Teaching Assistant. She also enjoyed the challenge of writing her master's thesis. "It's still something I look back on and think, 'did I really write that?' It's also a body of work that I feel confident I'll never really finish—I left myself plenty of room to revisit the material.

"Get your work done. At least force people to impose deadlines on you so you can put off the work until two days before it's due and, in a white-noise fit of inspiration, you accomplish it with minutes to spare."

For more on these graduates and other English department alumni, visit www.wku.edu/english/alumni-profiles/home.php, or go to wku.edu/english and click on the "Alumni" tab.