A Guide to Career Resources & Services for English Majors

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The Stanford Career Development Center (CDC) provides guidance and resources for Stanford students’ lifelong career development. This guide, created specifically for undergraduate English majors, aims to demystify the career planning and job search process. It considers the applicability of your background in literary studies and creative writing to many fields of employment, as well as suggests strategies for beginning career exploration.

An array of career opportunities exist for English majors, including those in such fields as law, business, publishing, film, broadcasting, finance, healthcare, library sciences, journalism and education. This guide aims to help you determine your career interests and leverage the skills you have developed through English studies into meaningful employment.

As an English major, you are developing a heightened awareness of the power of language. Your considerable vocabulary, understanding of style, advanced critical thinking abilities, and experience writing complex, original work, gives you distinctive verbal capabilities: precision, subtlety, persuasiveness, and clarity all number among the tools at your disposal. Your knowledge of historical trends in, and applications of, written discourse, further strengthens your analytical abilities and your engagement with modern writing in any field. These qualities, coupled with the skill to communicate clearly and effectively, will serve you well in a wide range of fields.

As you begin your career search, remember that the CDC offers professional career counseling services, available to aid you through various aspects of career planning and job searching, such as the daunting task of preparing for job interviews. A more detailed listing of the CDC’s services is just one of the many tools that will be provided to you through this guide. In order to access several of these CDC resources you will need to register with the CDC. To do so, simply visit the CDC website: studentaffairs.stanford.edu/cdc and click on Jobs and Internships Login.

Best of Luck!
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Career/Employment Opportunities

The career/employment opportunities for Stanford English majors are many and diverse. Some of the fields most directly suited to your skills include industry, government, education, non-profits and journalism. Many organizations are eager to hire English majors, but it may be difficult to find them and to contact them effectively. This guide will aid you in getting started.

Below we have tried to organize the job market into categories and job titles. This list should help you analyze your interests and passions and focus your job search.

Public Relations: The less conspicuous counterpart to advertising, PR firms create buzz in the media about their client’s products and keep track of how and how often the clients are mentioned. PR firms also help manage their client’s public image during times of crisis.

Advertising: A full-service ad agency develops the advertising strategy, conceptualizes and produces ads, and purchases the print/TV/internet/radio space necessary for ad placement.

Publishing Houses: Most entry-level positions carry administrative responsibilities and require experience with proofreading, drafting newsletters, and layout editing. Houses tend to specialize in a certain sector of publishing – Trade (wide variety of subjects), Academic (geared towards scholars, researchers, and university educators), Textbooks, and Specialty (focus on one or two kinds of books).

Periodicals: Positions as a Journalist or Copyeditor, and positions in Marketing/Advertising, are generally suitable for an English major.

Literary Agencies: There are large agencies (William Morris Agency) mid-sized (with five to fifteen agents) and sole practitioners. An entry level position might be as an assistant to a Literary Agent.
Teaching

**With Credentials:** Each state has its own certification requirements which test a specific skill set for each age group/area of study.

**Without Credentials:** Private schools and Education Corporations (like Teach for America) have requirements specific to each school and program.

Public Service

**Non-Profit:** The types of jobs and skills required for advocacy, grant writing, and civic organizations vary with the type and size of the organization – in general, individuals with strong communication and fundraising skills, as well as creativity – are most desired. Prior volunteer work for a specific cause is almost always necessary.

**Federal Government:** Jobs available include Editorial Assistant, Printing Specialist, Public Affairs Specialist, Technical Writer/Editor, Writer and Editor, Misc. Programs Specialist, Program Analyst, Program Manager, and Management Analyst.

Industry

**Human Resources Specialist:** These workers help a company to enhance morale and productivity, limit job turnover, use employee skills, and provide development opportunities to improve these skills. Certification in a specific area (benefits, training, etc.) can be beneficial.

**Technical Writer:** These employees present technical information in coherent language in such formats as operating instructions, how-to manuals, and assembly instructions for use by technical support staff, consumers, and users within the company. These staff members may also be involved in usability studies in order to help with design development.

**Internal Communications:** These positions will cover a company’s internal strategic messages. They use various forms of communication, including emails, newsletters, training programs, websites, social media and even speech writing for management.
Industry, cont.

**Entertainment:** Jobs in scriptwriting, screenwriting, or news writing can often begin with Production Assistant positions, Editorial Assistant positions or as a Marketing Assistant.

**Law**

**Paralegal:** Helping lawyers prepare for hearings, closings, and trials through research of the facts of the case and other relevant information including appropriate laws, judicial decisions, and legal articles. Certification is beneficial and sometimes required.

**Legal Advocacy:** Work as an assistant for a public interest lawyer who advocates for specific social concerns. Look for nonprofit organizations providing legal services for an issue or population of interest. Research Analyst positions for lobbyists can also utilize the skills of an English major.

**Graduate Study**

Students with exceptional abilities sometimes decide to pursue a graduate degree in English Literature, either a doctorate (PhD) or a master’s degree (MA). The decision to undertake graduate study requires careful thought and planning. If you are interested, talk to your English advisor early in your junior year (or sophomore year if possible) to begin the process. It is also advantageous to speak with your English TAs and faculty members about the pleasures and risks of graduate study as well as the specifics of the application process.

English majors also often decide to pursue professional graduate degrees, such as business, law, education, or medicine. The Undergraduate Academic Life office assists students with the graduate school application process. Check their web page “Planning for Graduate and Professional School” at ual.stanford.edu. In addition, you should talk with professionals in your future field of interest to help you decide what’s right for you.
Careers no longer follow the linear paths that they have for previous generations. The area of study you pursue in college provides you with a broad range of opportunities after graduation rather than training for one specific career path. The skills you have developed as an English major – including technical analysis and interpretation, critical and creative writing, and historical synthesis – prepare you for a range of possible careers, including the following:

**Management**

Requires skills in:
- Time management
- Research and analysis
- Project management
- Teamwork

**Communication**

Requires skills in:
- Written and oral communication
- Argument and persuasion
- Editing and proofreading
- Simplifying jargon
- Independent thinking

**Research**

Requires skills in:
- Critical reasoning and analysis
- Evaluation of argument and theory
- Hypothesis creation
- Cohesive presentation
- Synthesis of multiple sources
What Stanford English Alumni Are Saying: Literary Skills with Broad Applications

Law
“For the past five years, I have been practicing law in Atlanta, GA, with a focus on legal issues surrounding the financing of non-profit corporations, low income housing, schools, hospitals, and other public projects. In my practice I primarily focus on the specific meaning of words and their use in contractual language. The skills that I developed in analyzing literary works has helped immensely in the interpretation and drafting of my work.” – Atlanta, GA

Finance
“Despite being a double major in English and Economics, my English major has been much more valuable in my career in Finance. Being able to think critically about the business and industries we invest in as well as clearly communicating is absolutely important. My English major helped me significantly in this.” – San Francisco, CA

Teaching
“What I appreciated most about my time at Stanford in the English Department was seeing the passion of some of my instructors. I model my teaching on their passion and desire to connect the literature to our lives.” – San Francisco, CA

Journalism
“I was a print reporter for the Alameda Newspaper Group. In late ’98, I relocated to the Washington DC bureau of NBC News to work for Dateline, where I produce, write, and research investigative news reports.” – Chevy Chase, MD

Medicine
“I began medical school in the fall of 2002. I had many insecurities declaring English because I was afraid I would graduate with few skills besides being prepared for teaching, writing, or pursuing a PhD. However, pursuing science and medicine with an English degree not only helped me to stand out as a unique candidate among thousands of Biology majors, but it also strengthened other important qualities that contribute to a person’s well-roundedness (such as speaking, writing, and interpersonal skills).” – Brooklyn, NY
Entertainment
“I started off working at a café and concentrating on fiction writing. After winning an award from the Berkeley Fiction Review, I switched genres and worked for NBC’s Internet venture, and then as a Financial Editor for one of the world’s largest investment banks. I moved to L.A., where I was a Story Analyst for one of Hollywood’s most prestigious talent agencies before becoming a Marketing Executive at Disney. My English degree from Stanford gave me the education to pursue a broad range of opportunities, and a passport to be noticed by top-tier organizations.” – Los Angeles, CA

Public Relations
“I studied English because I enjoyed the courses, not because I thought it would help me get a specific job. I started working in professional sports immediately after graduation in a position with the SF 49ers Media Relations Department. PR and Media Relations are all writing and oral communications based. My English degree proved I had the basic skills to learn how to do the job. Now, I run my own Media Relations department for a pro Women’s basketball team.” – Sacramento, CA

Mental Health
“I’ve held several social worker jobs since graduation, in mental health, child protection, specializing in the 0-3 year-old population and infant mental health. I’m currently a Medical Social Worker and work with sick and disabled kids. My English degree has served me well in writing and research skills – I’ve used it for grant writing, policy making, program development, communication with clients at different levels, etc.” – San Jose, CA

Publishing
“I moved to New York with 5 friends from Stanford, then worked in the Internet development division in Harper Collins. I became the online Marketing Manager for children’s books and built websites like LemonySnicket.com and BeverlyClearly.com. Now, I’m working in Editorial at Chronicle Books in San Francisco.” – Ross, CA
This guide assumes that the readers are undergraduate students pursuing a degree in English. The CDC provides professional counselors to help committed English students identify their interests and functional role within this broad field. In addition, they offer help in clarifying goals and preferred work environments. However, students sometimes find themselves hesitant or concerned that they have made the right major or career choices. For these students, the CDC counselors also are ready to help you assess your interests, strengths and values.

**CDC Appointments**

The CDC offers two types of face-to-face appointments with its counselors.

**Individual 45 Minute Appointments:** For an appointment, log into your Cardinal Careers account, click on the link “Request an Appointment”

**Short 15 Minute Drop-in Appointments:** First come – first served, Monday – Friday, 11 AM - Noon, 2 PM - 4 PM

**The CDC Career Resource Library**

The CDC Career Resource Library supports the Stanford English Department with a wide array of information on organizations in which English graduates and students find employment. The library contains a highly selective collection of books, magazines, e-books, guides and videos; all to assist you in learning about the world of work.

The CDC library possesses many books and other materials that relate to career planning and job searching in humanities fields. See the Appendix of this guide for a sample list.

**Networking**

Networking is a broad subject. It means contacting people that have information of value to you regarding companies and job opportunities in your field of interest. They may be friends or classmates who are already working in your field, professors,
Networking, cont.
or even friends of your parents who may be knowledgeable. Networking is a search for information to use in your pursuit of a career. At this stage of your employment quest, networking is not asking for a job.

The CDC has a Guide to Informational Interviews that is available online at studentaffairs.stanford.edu/cdc/networking/informational-int

The CDC oversees the Stanford Alumni Mentoring (SAM) program in which alumni volunteer to provide Stanford undergraduate students with career guidance and life after Stanford advice. Access this site: mentoring.stanford.edu.

The commercial website, LinkedIn, offers 1000’s of professional profiles and the ability to link with individuals for career advice and job opportunities. Join at linkedin.com.

There are many Stanford student societies that offer networking opportunities with members. Search the Stanford websites for student organizations that interest you.

Professional associations or societies can be powerful allies in the search for employer information. There are associations for all industries and many of them accept student memberships or volunteers. To identify relevant associations, ask your networking connections if they belong to any of these groups or recommend any, or perform an internet search using keywords such as “technical writers association” or “fundraiser society.” Research the groups you find to identify local chapter meetings, national conventions or job listings. If there are any local meetings or seminars, try to attend. You will meet professionals who are doing exactly what you are exploring and you will be in a room full of potential informational interviewees.
Preparing to Contact/Meet with Employers

The importance of preparing yourself to contact or meet with prospective employers cannot be overestimated. In addition to researching employment opportunities and organizational information, you should create a resume and other documents that describe you in terms that are of interest to an employer. When an interview is scheduled it’s important to organize your thoughts and practice your interviewing skills.

The CDC Career Planning Handbook

The CDC Career Planning Handbook is revised annually. It is a comprehensive booklet containing a wealth of information on the entire job search process. It contains job search strategies, examples of resumes and cover letters, interview etiquette and dress, job offer negotiations and much more.

This handbook is extremely useful for all Stanford English students. Copies are available free on the second and third floors of the CDC and in PDF format on the CDC website at: studentaffairs.stanford.edu/cdc/services/handbook.

Creating a Resume

Your resume is one of the most important documents that you will use in your job search. An effective resume opens the door of opportunity for you and acts as a roadmap for interviewers during the selection process. It also acts as your spokesperson long after the interview is over. The creation of a proper résumé is not a topic that can be addressed in the few short pages of this guide. However, you can find comprehensive advice, with many samples, in the following references as well as from a CDC career counselor.

Book: *Knock ’em Dead Resumes* – Yate, Eighth Edition

Book: *The CDC Career Planning Handbook*

Website: studentaffairs.stanford.edu/cdc/resumes
Preparing to Contact/Meet with Employers

Creating a Cover Letter

The purpose of writing a cover letter is to interpret the facts on the resume and highlight your skills and experience for the prospective employer. It is also an example of your writing skills. It is often the first contact with an employer, so it is important to make a good impression.

For help in writing an effective cover letter see the following guides and aids:

- Book: *Knock 'em Dead Cover Letters* – Yate, Eighth Edition
- Book: *The CDC Career Planning Handbook*
- Website: student.afrairs.stanford.edu/cdc/resumes/cv-let

The Interview

The interview is one of the most important elements of your job search. It is your opportunity to persuade an employer that you are the right person for the job. One of the critical things you should do before the interview is research the company’s services, structure, values and mission statement. This allows you to find common ground and become invested in the interviewer’s work. Types of interviews include phone, Skype, in-person, dining, screening, and group. There are many resources available to aid you in the preparation for an interview, including:

- Book: *The CDC Career Planning Handbook*
- Book: *Knock ‘em Dead Interviews 2010* – Yate
- Website: studentaffairs.stanford.edu/cdc/interviewing

Workshops

The CDC offers a variety of useful workshops and special programs throughout the academic year. Log-in to your Cardinal Careers account to check the CDC Calendar of Events for scheduling details: student.afrairs.stanford.edu/cdc/jobs-internships. Some events of interest for English students are:

- Quick Networking Tips
- Resume and Cover Letter Essentials
- Interviewing Strategies
Strategies for Contacting Employers

There are many avenues available for English majors to meet prospective employers, on campus and off. The obvious purpose of all of your preparation is to meet with an employer for an interview. The number of organizations coming to the campus specifically looking for your major is limited. However, many organizations come to the campus looking for “all majors” or “humanities majors.” These employers may provide attractive opportunities for English majors. But for higher employment probabilities, the English student must apply his/her outreach skills and resourcefulness.

The avenues of opportunity to meet employers can be categorized as follows.

Networking

The CDC Guide to Informational Interviews will walk you through the process of a professional networking meeting (studentaffairs.stanford.edu/cdc/networking/informational-int). Make a list of Stanford alumni to contact from the CareerContact database. Add to your list referrals from faculty, classmates, family and friends. Check the Career Fields web pages (studentaffairs.stanford.edu/cdc/research) for links to professional associations. These associations or societies are a great place to meet a professional from whom to request a meeting. Follow up with your network to keep in touch.

Direct Outreach to Organizations

Another job search strategy is to contact employers directly, whether or not you see a job listing for them. Make a list of employers in which you have an interest and contact them. Target 5 to 10 organizations to begin. Contact can be made through a phone call, a cover letter and resume, or sometimes by an inquiry email.

Job Postings

The CDC’s Job and Internship database includes thousands of postings throughout the year. These listings don’t include everything out there for English majors but it’s a great place
Job Postings, cont.

to start looking. Log on to the Cardinal Careers database at: studentaffairs.stanford.edu/cdc/jobs-internships.

From the same website you can also login to iNet Internships, a consortium between Stanford and ten other US universities with over 500 summer/part-time internship positions. These listings often include a greater variety geared toward liberal arts majors.

Some job listings are specific to a location or industry. For example Idealist.org includes non-profit job listings and Mediabistro.com lists jobs in book publishing, public relations and more. To find more of these website links, visit studentaffairs.stanford.edu/cdc/research.

Job Fairs

The CDC hosts large and small career fairs throughout the academic year. The fairs are designed to provide opportunities to talk one-on-one with representatives from recruiting companies regarding internship opportunities and full-time jobs. They also allow you to explore an organization’s mission, values and culture. To find a list of these fairs visit: studentaffairs.stanford.edu/cdc/services/career-fair-schedule

On-Campus Recruiting

The CDC hosts the Cardinal Recruiting program which brings employers on campus to interview current students looking for jobs. Interviews are typically held at the CDC and encompass both internships and full-time jobs. There are a variety of organizations that hire students through this program. The largest groups represent the industries of management consulting, finance and engineering. To get started, go to: studentaffairs.stanford.edu/cdc/services/cardinal-overview.
Appendix

Books in the CDC Library
*I’m an English Major - Now What?* - Lemire
*Great Jobs for English Majors* - Degalan, Lambert
*Great Jobs for Liberal Arts Majors* - VGM Career Horizons
*Top Careers for Communications Graduates* - Checkmark Books

Books to Download Online
1) Go to studentaffairs.stanford.edu/cdc/services/career-library
2) Select Vault CareerInsider, under Top Resources
3) Register using your Stanford e-mail address
4) Select the “Guides” button
5) Select “Industry” or “Employers” and download the guide(s) below of interest

Vault Career Guides to:
- Advertising
- Book Publishing
- Education Careers
- Fundraising & Philanthropy
- Government Agency Careers
- Human Resources
- Journalism & Information Media
- Library Careers
- Marketing & Brand Management
- Media, Entertainment, & Journalism Careers
- Screenwriting Careers
- Television Writing Careers

Vault Employer Guides to:
- Top Advertising and PR Employers
- Top Government and Nonprofit Agencies
- Top Media & Entertainment Employers
- Top Publishing & Journalism Employers
Many thanks to the Department of English for their helpful assistance in developing this booklet.

Visit our home page: studentaffairs.stanford.edu/cdc