

# CAREER VIEW

## ENGLISH

“There is no doubt fiction makes a better job of the truth.” - Doris Lessing

Fiction is everywhere and everything is based on the telling of stories in some way and the story can shine a light on the facts. It can also point the way to solving some of life's big problems. You probably love words, reading, writing, blogging, talking – all the stuff of communication – and want to deepen your knowledge and understanding of our rich literary traditions. In this age of information (and misinformation), it is increasingly important to be able to interpret and analyse writing in all its forms and tell your own story convincingly and with integrity.

### WHY STUDY ENGLISH?

Language and literature are key ingredients in many cultures, unlocking the ability to learn and communicate. University study takes communication and thinking skills to a much higher level. Through reading and analysing texts from different ages and cultures, you can deepen your understanding of human nature and behaviour. You will develop intellectual rigour as you grapple with the diverse thought processes of authors whose lives and circumstances may be very different from your own. You can then draw on the insights and ideas of these writers, and learn from the astonishingly creative ways they use language to communicate their view of life. That is the serious part of study. Then there's the sheer pleasure of enjoying a good read.

### WHAT SKILLS DO ENGLISH STUDENTS DEVELOP?

The ability to use and understand language is fundamental to every human culture. For example, an assignment in editing a text will teach thoroughness and discipline as well as skills in close reading, attention to detail, research and analysis, and linguistic knowledge. These skills are invaluable in this age where the ability to access and communicate information and understand people's experience of the world are as important as the ability to analyse and interpret data.

#### Communication and presentation

Undergraduate study of English enhances students' ability to read and write purposefully



and persuasively, to understand and communicate complex ideas and information through written work and oral presentations. Everyday we are exposed to a huge range of information and misinformation. Skilled communicators who can write accurately and appropriately are in high demand.

Effective communication is also about listening and understanding. In the fast pace of most work environments, managers need help to analyse and understand large amounts of information.

Career View explores how degrees and courses relate to employment opportunities and to life/work planning. It includes graduate destination information and current employment issues. Your comments and suggestions are always welcomed.

Wellington Careers and Employment.  
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Decision-makers in public and private sectors need information presented to them succinctly and convincingly. Many fields of work require writing in a way that enhances searchability, catches attention and persuades the reader. The study of English language and literature challenges the mind to engage with texts, language and issues using imagination and empathy, attention to detail, logic and critical thinking. Through the close reading of texts, from medieval to contemporary works, students learn to observe, describe, analyse and define. When writing about texts they learn to structure their thoughts to present clear, evidence-based arguments. These skills are invaluable in this digital and information age.

### Critical thinking

The close reading of literature requires an open mind and the ability to ask questions. As students develop these skills they learn to use different conceptual frameworks, to think in the abstract, to analyse and interpret the form and content of what they read. In turn they may question, evaluate and compare the various frameworks. In writing an argument to support their views students also learn to critically evaluate and edit their own work.

### Creativity

Literary studies expose students to a wonderful variety of genres and individual styles. The works have their own originality and students learn to appreciate their artistry and intellectual creativity. Students need to write in a way that is well researched and original. When it comes to writing in any job, students of English will have a rich background from which to draw to produce their own written work, whether it is a report, marketing copy, website content or works of fiction.

### Analysis

Close analysis enables students to identify the elements of a text, to see patterns in language and to understand the meaning and intent of a writer. Through the process of analysis students also learn how a work connects to a wider context, what other writers are saying, literary and cultural history and literary theory.

### Research

Literature is written within the context of a particular time, place and culture. Students may do extensive research of a literary and historical nature as part of their studies. The process of asking questions, gathering information (facts and concepts) and evaluating material is a highly transferable skill sought by many employers for key work such as literature searches or user research.



### Writing and editing

Students of English develop the ability to write succinctly and coherently, to edit and proofread their own work to a high level of accuracy. In some assignments, students may edit the work of other authors. This skill is in high demand by employers for whom written communication is an important aspect of their core business.

## WHERE DO ENGLISH GRADUATES WORK?

English graduates are found wherever there is a need for highly developed communication and thinking skills. Technical expertise is not always the main criterion for employment, but a conjoint degree or double major that includes other subjects such as Law or Management can be an advantage. A degree in English is directly linked to teaching and education, to technical and creative writing, journalism, communications, public relations, web development, media, publishing and the creative industries. Graduates with English majors are found in other areas of work that include politics, administration, advertising, information management, retail management, science communication and finance.

### Public sector

Government departments, ministries and government

agencies employ English graduates in policy and administrative roles. Some ministries have graduate development programmes, depending on their recruitment needs and the economic climate. The Ministries of Education, Social Development, Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) and Internal Affairs are large ministries that need graduates with excellent generic skills.

Typically, a graduate entry-level position requires excellent, proven analytical skills, high-level oral and written communication skills, strong people skills, self-confidence and the ability to relate to and work with a diverse range of people, a good postgraduate degree: Honours degree or higher or a conjoint degree and an interest in issues pertaining to the work of the particular ministry.

Policy analysts need to be strong analytical thinkers, able to carry out detailed, thorough research using quantitative and qualitative methodologies. They must be able to see the big picture, think imaginatively and across disciplines, consider trends and possibilities in the longer term as well as gain a detailed understanding of a particular field. Excellent written and verbal communication skills are essential.

Ministerial writers need strong writing and research skills. Thinking agility and accuracy are also crucial, as ministers may want information on issues within hours. The ability to summarise well is essential as ministers have a lot of information to digest. The ability to manage interpersonal relationships and communicate with different stakeholders is also a key competency.

#### Education sector

Teaching English in secondary schools is a rewarding career for graduates with a passion for language and literature and the desire to work with young people. Early childhood and primary teaching are options for those wanting to work with children to establish the foundations of literacy. Teaching at university level usually requires a PhD. English students can advance their research and teaching skills by undertaking a Master's degree or PhD and may have the opportunity to tutor undergraduate students. Many students also go overseas to study. Other roles in tertiary institutions include academic advisors, career consultants or administrators. Adult education and training are other pathways.

Instructional design is an exciting growth area and may combine creative talent with

skills in design and multi-media, research, language and writing. Technical writing or learning resources are re-interpreted into usable online learning modules, product support and technical manuals.

#### Journalism and media

English graduates intending to work in the media as reporters, sub-editors, editors or producers usually require a relevant qualification. It is becoming more common for writers and journalists to write freelance for publications in print and online. Journalism experience is useful however, in order to learn about good practice in reporting and biases in media.

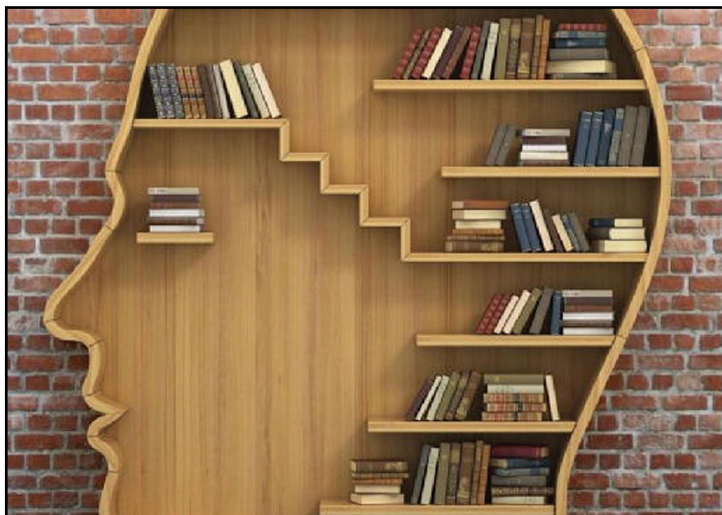
#### Public relations and communications

The process by which organisations establish and maintain goodwill and understanding with stakeholders requires people with excellent written and verbal communication and interpersonal skills. Industry specific qualifications are an advantage. Public relations seeks to manage public opinion by transmitting positive information to those the organisation wants to influence. The related function of communications is responsible for promoting an organisation's image and reputation to the public, as well as informing staff and clients about what is happening within the organisation. This may involve writing web content as well as material for pamphlets, articles, annual reports and media releases. With some experience graduates will go on to advise on communications policy and strategy.

#### Software and app development

English graduates can increasingly be found in the





technology sector in user experience (UX), analytics, project management and user-centred design. They can often be adept at identifying bugs in testing and act as a communication link between software developers and the end user.

#### Creative industries

New Zealand's creative industries encompass fields such as screen production, television, theatre, music, design, fashion, publishing, textiles and digital content. Some people make a full-time living as actors, playwrights and scriptwriters for theatre, film, television and radio. English graduates have also studied theatre and film, creative writing or gone on to drama school. As work in these industries is usually project based, many do other paid work to maintain a steady income. Reviewers may also be paid to comment on creative works and inspire debate. Some published authors make a living writing full time. Many supplement their income by writing freelance.

The rapid growth in the creative industries means new roles are emerging in advisory, management and educational areas. More entrepreneurial graduates may start their own companies and be supported by a collective or business incubator.

#### Museums and art galleries

Depending on their size, museums and art galleries employ staff in administration, education, exhibition design and display, publicity and communications. Exhibitions require skilled writers to write material about the exhibitions and exhibitors.

#### Library and information management

Public libraries, specialist libraries and information centres need staff with excellent communication skills, the ability to think laterally, research and identify reliable sources and summarise information. Efficient information management has become increasingly important with the explosion of

information made available through electronic media. English graduates may do additional qualifications in Information Management, but a higher degree in English will equip them to work well in this field.

#### Publishing

Large publishing companies, including legal publishers, employ editors, editorial assistants, project managers, designers and proofreaders. In legal publishing, a law degree may be necessary for roles such as legal editor. Smaller, more specialised publishing houses employ editorial and technical staff. English graduates may go on to do a postgraduate publishing or media qualification.

Editing is specialised work that aims to improve the quality of communication. Editors deal with words, as well as images, design, production or management. Editors may work for publishers of books, journals, newspapers and magazines or work freelance and much editing is now for online content. Editors in traditional book publishing may select and assess manuscripts and stories; rewrite text, proofread, plan layout; verify information in articles or manuscripts; manage budgets; commission authors; negotiate contracts and train editorial staff. Online content editors will work on content strategies, and content management systems and processes. They work closely with UX designers and web developers to ensure content is usable and accessible.

#### Advertising

Advertising is a fast-paced, competitive industry. Agencies employ staff with a range of roles and skill requirements: account managers who work with clients to plan campaigns and manage the production of advertisements; creatives who generate ideas for advertisements; copywriters who write the advertisements; the media team that determines which media to use and the best-value space to reach the target audience.

#### Human resources

Human resource professionals work in large public or private sector organisations. They may work with a consultancy or run their own business. A human resources officer develops, advises on and implements policies concerning the effective use of personnel within an organisation. Graduates may have additional qualifications in business management, finance, human resources or organisational psychology.

#### Business/financial sector

Employers recognise that the ability to communicate well with clients and customers is vital to success in

## GRADUATE PROFILES

business. A conjoint degree in subjects such as Law, Chemistry or Marketing opens the field even wider. In law firms, graduates who have a combined degree in arts and law may be practising solicitors, patent examiners or law librarians. A degree combining English with marketing would be very useful in marketing, public relations or advertising.

### JOB TITLES

The following is a sample of job titles taken from our graduate destination surveys. Some roles may require postgraduate qualifications and training.

Administrator • business analyst • business designer • business development adviser • caption writer • communications advisor • content analyst • copywriter • customer experience (CX) • editor • English language teacher • foreign policy officer • graduate management trainee • human resource advisor • instructional designer • journalist • marketing assistant • library assistant • librarian • media coordinator • primary teacher • proofreader • policy adviser • policy analyst • recruitment coordinator • secondary teacher • social media coordinator • technical writer • training and development advisor • transcriber • user experience (UX) • writer



### Lana Gibson

#### Analytics and Data Strategist Lanalytics



I love reading! Dad gave me counterculture novels like Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* when I was a teenager, which allowed me to go road-tripping across the US from my bedroom in Palmerston North. I took my degree with no career goal, although my parents told me that it would help me get a job as long as no practical skills were required! My degree allowed me to escape into different times and places, and it challenged my beliefs and values. I loved learning about different perspectives on the same topic, for example I studied 1960s US in art history, English literature and politics. It was also fun not having to know up from down in the student hostel bubble.

English Literature certainly sharpened my critical thinking and communications skills. I learnt how to explore a concept using different reference points, and use evidence to make a persuasive case. It helps with my data work as I use Google Analytics, search engine optimisation (SEO), and other data to understand user needs. I get insights from these data sources to form a recommendation, and communication is crucial to get the data understood and acted on by those who use it.

My degree helped me get a temping office job in London where I gained digital experience. I then landed a content writing job on a New Zealand government website, which opened the door to different digital roles. Critical thinking skills help me take advantage of opportunities, and communicating the value of data helps me attract new clients. My degree helps keep my mind on the people using tech products which is a lot of the value in what I do. It's not called a humanities degree for nothing. A bit of imagination also helps - the internet is a strange, intangible thing.

English Literature won't suit pragmatists who want to map out their career and income trajectory. Do it if you want the skills to communicate, respond to change, and are happy to learn throughout your career. I love this Jack Kerouac quote - 'My life is a vast, inconsequential epic with a thousand and a million characters, here they come, as swiftly as we roll east, as swiftly as the earth rolls east.'

And be aware that spouting pretentious quotes is an unavoidable side effect of taking an English Literature degree!

### Tihema Baker

Private Secretary to the  
Minister for Crown/Māori  
Relations  
Author



When I left high school, I wanted to be a teacher. English was my favourite subject. So I thought I would major in English Literature and then complete a Graduate Diploma of Teaching. I also took a couple of te reo Māori and Māori Studies courses, hoping to properly learn the language of my tūpuna and grow my knowledge of our history and tikanga. Those papers hooked me, and I soon picked up Māori Studies as a second major.

My English papers exposed me to literature I would never have read otherwise. There was so much to learn by exploring the literature of different parts of the world, cultures, and time periods. The literature that resonated with me most, though, was from closer to home: New Zealand and Pacific literature for example. Māori Literature so often explores our collective experience as Māori within a post-colonial society, so I enjoyed absorbing these stories while learning about the historical context behind them.

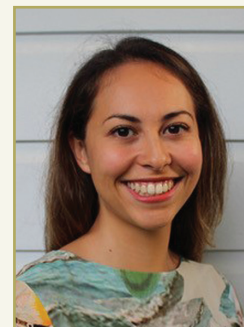
My complimentary English and Māori Studies majors fostered critical thinking and analysis. I learned to communicate clearly in both written and oral forms, presenting and defending my ideas or views to others. These are core skills I have drawn on throughout my career. But I also learned so many things I apply outside of work; studying English Literature has benefited my own creative writing, for example, and learning te reo Māori has enabled me to challenge myself to write creatively in another language.

I was fortunate to get a job as an Analyst at the Office of Treaty Settlements (OTS). As well as the core skills, my knowledge of our history and Treaty settlements set me up well for this. From there I moved to the Post-Settlement Commitments Unit at the Ministry of Justice as a Policy Advisor, later taking on the role of Senior Advisor Māori, and then into my current position as a Minister's Private Secretary. I haven't looked back since.

I still get raised eyebrows when I tell colleagues I have a degree in English Literature. I don't think people see how it can contribute to a career like mine as a public servant. It's the soft stuff that I've found really valuable; insight and appreciation of other cultures and worldviews, connecting with people and building relationships, and the simple enjoyment of an inspiring book.

### Sarah Maiava

Production Manager  
Tagata Pasifika (SunPix)



I initially chose a broad range of courses in my first year of undertaking a BA, including one English paper. I chose English as my major at some point during my second year because I simply really enjoyed it. I felt stimulated creatively and intellectually and it was fun! The teachers were excellent, the classes engaging and I was reading fascinating books I wouldn't necessarily have come across otherwise. I found that English naturally became a solid foundation for my BA and complemented other courses well, that ranged from art history and music to film and marketing. You see, you don't have to be a total bookworm to study English - to find it a rewarding subject you just need to be curious about the stories people have to tell.

I enjoyed exploring the worlds of novels and the contexts in which they were written, thinking about the characters and ideas presented in the novels. I loved the storytelling and learning about how stories are told (and whose stories are told). I enjoyed thinking about the different ways you could interpret a story. Understanding storytelling has served me way beyond literature into how I understand the world. I can understand various interpretations of not just books but ideas, events and even people. My studies also sharpened my creativity, developing the ability to come up with my own original ideas. It honed my writing skills and the ability to communicate with a wide range of people. Particularly at Honours level, I extended my critical thinking skills and gained the confidence to be an engaged, independent thinker.

English studies have led to a range of interesting work. I was a caption producer for Able NZ, who provide captioning for all forms of media services, so that it is more accessible. I then did a Creative New Zealand Tautai Internship in theatre and visual arts (Q Theatre, Auckland Art Gallery). I then moved into media as a TV Production Intern. I am now a Production Manager for Tagata Pasifika, which tells the stories of Pacific Islanders and our community. The knowledge and skills I gained through my Honours Degree in English have been invaluable, and I believe employers have seen the unique contribution a degree in English can bring.

## Sarah Parry

English Teacher  
Kāpiti College



When I came to university, my first timetable listed Classics and Anthropology as my major subjects, with English as nothing more than an interest paper. I had always loved the subject at high school, but I forced myself to put it to one side in favour of new, more exciting ones that I'd never had the chance to study before. But then I couldn't do it. By the end of the first year, I had added English as a third major to my BA, and was happier than I had ever been. I wasn't sure where I wanted it to take me - I had been told I wasn't assertive enough to be a teacher (which turned out to be wrong), and the amount of jobs that required 'good communication skills' which all of my subjects had given me were frankly overwhelming. Fast-forward five years, and I had a Master's degree in English, and had spent five years of my life doing what I loved - reading and writing about books.

I didn't think much about teaching again until I was given the opportunity to tutor while doing my Master's. Watching other people come to their own realisations about some of the greatest texts in history made me realise that I wanted to keep doing it. Introducing students to new books and ways of thinking about them is one of the most rewarding experiences in the world. It also gives me a legitimate excuse to talk about books all day.

If you're looking to study English, don't be put off by the lack of jobs that list 'a degree in English Literature' among their list of must-haves. Studying English isn't just about reading (although that's the biggest attraction - being given grades for talking about books!). It's about communicating, seeing the world through the eyes of another person and realising exactly what that means. The ability to understand another person's perspective and critically analyse the information given is valuable in a number of fields - from sorting out a playground dispute to progress meetings with students and their caregivers. The ability to craft a convincing argument, to sift through information and question its relevance, to look at what is being said and what is not being said, these aren't just transferable skills for employers - they're life skills.

## Stephanie Pride

Professional Futurist  
StratEDGY



I always loved reading and grew up with parents who knew the importance of books. At secondary school, I read Katherine Mansfield's short story, 'Daughters of the Late Colonel' which led to a lifelong relationship with her works and a strong desire to come to New Zealand. My love of English led to three wonderful years reading English at Oxford University and then a Commonwealth Scholarship to undertake a PhD at Wellington. My PhD was a study of colonial identity in the works of Katherine Mansfield, Janet Frame and Robin Hyde.

One of the key abilities that the study of English Literature develops is 'meta-critical reflexivity', that is the ability to see, understand and critique the way in which we understand the world and the systems we have constructed. Reading texts from different historical periods helps you to understand the ways in which today's social arrangements are constructed rather than natural, and to imagine alternative possibilities for future social arrangements. A PhD also hones research skills in relation to existing knowledge as well as creating new models of thinking.

Following my PhD, I taught English Literature at Victoria, then worked in several public sector roles. I found that my training in literary analysis transferred directly to policy analysis; understanding the over-arching systems and the construction of the component parts. In a role at the State Services Commission, I was asked to explore what systems and structures were needed for the future of the state sector. This work created the opportunity to set up a Futures Programme that included helping Chief Executives to develop a shared understanding of the future, and then led to a Chief Advisor role with an OECD affiliated project on the 20 year future of schooling. The next natural step was to set up my own consultancy as a professional futurist.

We have entered a period of profound disruption. Exponential changes in climate, technology, social organisation and the world of work impact on everybody so it is critical that we can articulate now what our possible and preferred futures might look like. One aspect of my role as a futurist is to help people to surface and articulate the assumptions, update those assumptions in the light of the changing world and then shape new narratives of the future.