

## Why Employers Hire English Majors

**#1 Written Communication Skills:** Employers rate the ability to clearly communicate in written form critical. From the everyday communication within a business, organization or government agency (like emails, memos, etc.) to communication to the public and other organizations (advertising/marketing, social media, product or service descriptions, appeals for support, etc.), effective communication using the written word is essential. Few, if any, majors have the concentrated work in written communication as the English major – from the nitty-gritty of punctuation, spelling and grammar, to the more subtle art of persuasively communicating with clarity and style.

**#2 Verbal Communication Skills:** Close behind writing skills, verbal communication skills are important to employers. English majors are often comfortable with communicating verbally, and especially valuable is the ability to communicate in an organized way on the spot – the ability to quickly organize support for a clearly articulated point (something English majors do endlessly in courses) can make a huge difference in getting a sale, in motivating others within and outside the organization, in communicating the organization's purpose or "story", etc. Strong verbal communications skills (along with writing ability) are also noted as critical to those who become organizational leaders.

**#3 Critical Thinking Skills:** This skill set is rooted in highly developed reading skills: the ability to read (or listen) while analyzing, questioning, and connecting to other information. But beyond reading, critical thinking skills allow the English major to look below the surface of everything, analyze assumptions, question facts or inferences, connect references or relevant outside information to the situation. In addition, English majors have the oral and written communication skills to articulate their understanding to others in the organization.

**#4 Research Skills:** The saying "information is power" is a commonplace, but it is true only if the information is understood and accessible/usable by the organization. In today's complex and interconnected world, every organization needs people who can find relevant information, understand it, evaluate it, and deliver it to those who need it. Clearly this is an area where English majors are well-trained.

**#5 Empathy:** Though the term "empathy" is often used by employers, the common definition doesn't fully cover this skill set. This so-called "soft skill" is made up of different elements, all of which English majors are prepared to use. First, the simplest type of empathy (often called cognitive empathy) is the ability to understand the situation of another person (and especially their motives given the situation, including the ability to predict what they will do, and how and why). Research suggests that English majors, as effective readers of fiction and other forms of literature, are adept at understanding and analyzing the motives of characters, and this does in fact translate to understanding and empathizing with people in real life. Often emotional empathy (the ability to feel someone else's feelings) evolves from this. But there is another aspect of this skill set particularly useful in today's global economy (not to mention the United States' own diversity) – the ability to understand that one's own cultural reference is only one of many. English majors are exposed to literature of many times, places and cultures, and this fosters a deep understanding that people may be coming from a wide range of ethnic, cultural, national, and/or religious values. This skill is one many of the humanities cultivate, but English majors bring this empathy along with the other four skills. And as a particularly human skill, it is difficult to computerize or outsource or fake (without significant loss of impact). Some businesses have learned the hard way that a lack of cultural awareness and empathy costs them good will and money.