

Advice from John Jay English Alumni

for current students



Class of 2010

What To Do as A Student

Say Yes to Challenge

Use past and current struggles as fuel in your studies. I never forgot my past failures and struggles. I made sure a new narrative was written during my time at John Jay. — Class of 2013

Being an English major is extremely demanding but rewarding. The knowledge you take not only from professors but from your peers is priceless. As difficult and trying as your college experience as an English major may seem it all pays off in the end. Knowing the challenges you've overcome is the greatest feeling in the world. — Class of 2014

Seek Out Your Professors

- ◆ Start early, especially for research. Go to your professors if you feel lost; they are truly there to help you not condemn you. **PROOF READ.** You're going to fail, and it's okay - keep moving. You don't succeed actually until you fail. But learn from your mistakes, if not its just a mistake. – During 2013
- ◆ Seek the help of your professors, you will need them to write you a recommendation letter for grad school. – Class of 2013
- ◆ I would encourage them to stress less and make better use of college resources. Develop relationships with professors and speak to them about possible career opportunities. I would also welcome the confusion instead of denying it. – Class of 2014
- ◆ It's a large school; do your best to fully appreciate the professors that do the most. Glean from them everything that you can. – Class of 2013
- ◆ **NETWORKING;** This is probably one of the most important factors a college student should know. Talk to your professors, build a relationship with them and ask them all the riveting questions you may have regarding career choices and post grad choices. Having professors to talk to helps a lot with making the right decisions about your life and what path you should take for your career. – Class of 2013



**With an English degree
you can expand your
mind. Take advantage
of the program.
— Class of 2013**

◆ Keep your mind open to all possibilities and explore all options. I didn't even know I wanted to write for film/TV until my senior year. Before then, I thought I'd be a lawyer. And as clichéd as it may sound, never give up on your dreams and never let your passion fade. — Class of 2014

◆ **Revise!! Revise!!!** Use all the resources available; go to Writing Center so you can improve on your writing skills. Sit with professionals and get insight on how to improve your writing skills. – Class of 2012

Go to The Writing Center

◆ Go to the Writing Center! I honestly did not go to the writing center until senior year, but by that time I was swamped with work. Due to my hubris, I let my work pile up and it made me anxious and nervous all the time. I would tell current English majors that it takes time to acquire great reading and writing skills. It cannot be done overnight! — Class of 2014

◆ Focus more on your grades and work less (if you can). Go to the writing workshops. Writing is extremely important and you want to always present yourself as being educated in any field you are in. Also, enjoy the college life! You will miss your professors and all the interesting courses that were offered after you graduate. – Class of 2012

◆ I advise students to take advantage of the Writing Center and to read often. Reading, writing, and having others review your papers will make a successful and efficient writer. – Class of 2014

◆ Like any other skill, writing only improves with continuous practice. Keep at it, always challenge yourself to reach beyond your ability, and enjoy every step taken to perfect your writing. We all have our favorite or strongest writing style, however, I recommend stepping out of that comfort zone and exploring

different techniques. For those who are eager to attend law school, your undergraduate years are never too early to familiarize yourself with legal writing. – Class of 2013

Take a Diverse and Challenging Set of Courses — Stay Open to Possibilities

◆ I would advise students to take classes that challenge them and pull them out of their comfort zone. It may be a scary concept as students want to ensure the best grades as possible, but it is one of the most effective ways to learn new skills and grow as a student. There were classes I struggled with, but now, in hindsight, I'm glad I took the chance to study something unfamiliar. And I wish I had applied that concept to all of my classes and not just a few. – Class of 2011

◆ I'd tell current students to take from college what you can and not to limit themselves. I'd further explain that the best part of being an English major is that it is very diverse. So it would be wise to take a large variety of literature instead of sticking certain classes that gravitate around a certain time or school of thinking. — Class of 2012

Professionalize Now



Intern!

- ♦ I would stress the importance of joining clubs or applying for internships. As a student I worked full time after classes so I didn't use my time wisely. Now it's quite difficult to find a better career path. – Class of 2013
- ♦ Intern! Plan for your future while you are still in college because once you're out, it gets very discouraging to apply for jobs that will later reject you. Also, keep reading. – Class of 2014
- ♦ During college: get internships, join LinkedIn and network! – Class of 2011
- ♦ Make sure you apply to internships in addition to school work. It's one of my biggest regrets and I think it would have made it easier to find a better job than where I'm at now. – Class of 2012
- ♦ Take advantage of every scholarship, honors programs, special internships (like the Vera Institute), McNair and whatever else they can. These would make them well rounded and competitive applicants in both the job and graduate school markets. They should also have an eye on what they want to do but don't limit themselves to one set path on getting to the end. There are many ways to achieve their goals and they should learn what those ways are by networking with people in the field that they want to break into. – Class of 2012
- ♦ Take this time to gain internship experience and network. – Class of 2013
- ♦ I would suggest that they consider what career paths are available with the degree they are getting and to do internships. – Class of 2011
- ♦ INTERN during college. Do as much as you can to be involved in the working field. Otherwise, you'll be stuck with a high GPA and no job. – Class of 2012

Intern, volunteer and build personal branding. We live in a very tech central world, so your experience must be flexible. I started off as a computer science major before becoming an English major, and now I'm back in tech. Ask yourself what employers are most likely thinking to themselves when interviewing you, "So you're an English major, what can you do?" – Class of 2011

Be Focused, Resilient, and Mentally Tough

- ♦ Just stick with it. It's a rough road but you can make it. Stay focused. — Class of 2010
- ♦ It's a juggle combining life, work, school, and your career goals into a day or any period of time but you have to stay focused. Pay attention to your student loans if you have any. Be mindful of your credit, be responsible, and keep up the work. — Class of 2013
- ♦ The best advice I can give a current student studying English at John Jay is to take the major seriously. Don't let anyone discourage you. Many individuals have tried to discourage me, but I don't let them. Individuals at times laugh when I reply what degree I obtained. I struggle not to go off on individuals that laugh and say what can I do with a BA in English. I smile and reply back that having a English degree not only can I write very well. I can unpack any information put in my path. I can write better than any other major because years of practice. I plan on going into the school psychology field and one thing I stated to my interviewers about my degree is although I did not graduate with a Psychology degree I have the skills and knowledge that many students with the psychology background don't have. That is lots of researching techniques, unpacking information, and deciphering information and putting it in to words. — Class of 2013
- ♦ No one told me how time consuming the English major can be. The running joke is that if you're not a STEM major, you're not really "working hard." Incorrect. The English major asks of its students huge time and energy commitments. Timing and planning ahead is vital. I never learned much from procrastinating and reading a week's worth of text on the train (though I tried and tried again). The good

news: it feels like my brain works faster now that I've had to learn to read, digest, and write about many different texts across many different disciplines. It's a great skill to have. — Class of 2014

- ♦ The advice that I would give up and coming English graduates is to be patient and focused and if reading and writing is not a passion or something you are struggling with never be afraid to try new things. Venture into different aspects of learning and never allow yourself to give up. Explore what makes you joyful. As an English major what held me back was thinking I was wrong; that what I had to say was not interesting enough. I compared myself to my peers and not in a positive way. Then I received the best criticism from one of my professors: "Your paper could be amazing. You have a lot of great topics but I need you to focus on just one." After I left my professor's office the one thing that stuck with me was the idea that she believed that I had not just one great topic but many. It took a lot of practice in order for me to master controlling the many things I wanted to say and focusing on one topic. — Class of 2013
- ♦ While a student, ALWAYS do more than you are called upon to do. Don't wonder about anything: LOOK IT UP! In this way you will

Stay strong. Keep your head up, even at times when you're feeling discouraged. Just remember why you started and keep focused. — Class of 2012

develop the best work habits. Tell the Truth. Live brave and upright. Protect the People. Join a Union. This will help everyone. — Class of 2013

- ♦ Stick with it. It's worth it. — Class of 2014
- ♦ I would say one of my struggles was not having a clear idea as to what I wanted to pursue with my English degree. I would advise students to think about what would make them happy to do every day and to stick to that idea and make it possible. Also to really analyze if an English major can make this view happen. — Class of 2014
- ♦ Know exactly what you want to do with this degree and go for it. Do not procrastinate or let anything get in the way. — Class of 2010





Remember to relax and have fun. I thought I had no free time in school and now I actually have no free time. —
Class of 2014

Relax and Enjoy Yourself.

It's Going to Be Okay.

- ◆ Don't stress too much on your major, there are so many opportunities after college, you just have to be willing to step out of your comfort zone. – Class of 2011
- ◆ Advice I would give to current jjay english majors would be to really focus and enjoy what the classes are offering. It's best to make friends within the major and work together. I found that making friends really helped me get through the semester because we could all voice our struggles and help one another. Everything you learn in the major is definitely beneficial. After you graduate it's okay to take time off and get your thoughts together. I've taken this year off just to mentally figure out what I want to do and prepare myself for grad school. – Class of 2014

◆ Don't give in to e-books! Write all over your books and bend the bind. Build a library. Don't be afraid to ask questions, take risks, and voice your opinions. I believe that the English major is one of the very few majors and given opportunities where students are provided a platform where they can share and others care about what you have to say (for the most part, of course). – Class of 2012

◆ I absolutely loved my time as an English Major at John Jay, despite the fact that I ended up realizing a passion for something else and returning to school to study a different field. So my best advice would be to enjoy this time in your life where you can devote so much time to writing and reading. And after graduation, you'll find that a strong writing ability is incredibly useful in any field, and a surprising amount of people do not have that strength. – Class of 2011

Advice for After Graduation

The possibilities of what you can do when you are determined are endless.

— Class of 2012



Figure Out What You Love and Make Plans to Pursue It

♦ **DO WHAT YOU LOVE!** Doing what you love is very very rewarding. The English Department at John Jay helped me to find my passion and I am truly thankful. – Class of 2011

♦ It felt like torture not pursuing graduate school immediately after I graduated, but I was debating between a Master's in English studies and education. Taking this time, in the end, made me feel that I made the best and right choice for me. So my advice would be to take the time to take a break, however long, to just relish your accomplishments and to carefully think about your next step in life will be. If graduate school is where you want to be, then also take your time researching and visiting different schools, seeing what programs are the best fit for you as far as cost, location and program philosophy is concerned. Graduate school is fulfilling but it is a costly endeavor that also requires a lot of time and energy, so you do want to ensure that you are in the best place for you. – Class of 2012

♦ After college: make sure you enjoy what you're doing and that you're getting paid what you're worth. – Class of 2011

♦ An English degree is not as malleable as you would believe. The only way you're going to get a job is if you set your sights on one or two career paths, then get internships and network like crazy. I got my job in film because I knew someone who knew someone, and because I was available and had a driver's license. My degree had no bearing on my being hired. – Class of 2010

♦ It's hard to find a job after college but not impossible. The best way to optimize your chances is to take part in internships and gain mentors in your field. I had 2 part time jobs before landing my current position, which took me 8 months after graduation to find. However, if you set aside a time to apply for jobs everyday and make sure your materials are not generic sounding you will be fine. I found that the application materials that explained how my skills would benefit the company were helpful in my receiving responses. – Class of 2014



Be prepared to do a lot of things you don't want to, to get what you do want. Keep goals intact and make sure they're real before pursuing them. Set time lines and deadlines for these goals and be upfront with management as to what you want in the future. — Class of 2011

♦ Decide what career path you want to pursue and chase it; do not procrastinate. – Class of 2011

♦ Never stop trying to find your niche in the literary, artistic worlds. It bothers me that four years learning and reading literature are wasted when the material is so rich and valuable. I didn't know what I was going to do post-undergrad and was incredibly disappointed after I was rejected for a Fulbright Grant because of past failures on my record. However, those past failures meant I have stories, so I applied for the Hunter Creative Nonfiction MFA and I was accepted. I received a scholarship, a grant, and a stipend, just because I never stopped trying to find a way to use my talent and skills, all of which were fortified by my education at John Jay. I would also encourage them to strive towards artistic endeavors; everyone has a passion or a dream, and the pursuit of these things makes us artists. One cannot accept a post undergraduate life where the BA in English from John Jay College isn't the vehicle to success. – Class of 2013

♦ It's disheartening. I've taken a number of awful jobs since graduation in order to pay the bills--which everyone has to do at one point or another anyway--and the point is to continue applying to jobs you actually want in the free time you have. Personally, I would do that absolute bare minimum at these lousy job to keep from getting fired, devoting plenty of time even at work to apply to better positions at better establishments (and work on my manuscript, which I'm currently shopping to agents now; thanks Tourneau!). That may not be everyone's strategy but it certainly was mine. If asked to be less wordy about my advice, I'd summarize: "Learn to be flexible, never give up." – Class of 2010

♦ Use your resources wisely, follow your passion, and don't settle or give up easily when job searching after graduation. – Class of 2012

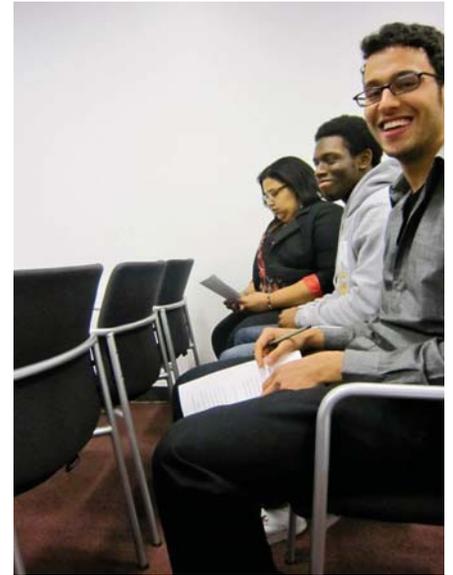
Don't Hesitate: Apply to Graduate School

- ♦ Don't delay graduate study. Prepare for the GREs (don't take the quantitative section lightly...it's good to be "well-rounded" in all three categories of the exam). AND don't let your scores expire. True story. – Class of 2010
- ♦ Continue on to obtain your masters or more. – Class of 2011
- ♦ Never take time off after receiving your BA. – Class of 2010
- ♦ Always continue to work towards your goal. Whether if its continuing your education or working in the field. You might not have the chance to begin working in an area that you desire first. But being well rounded is always an advantage. — Class of 2013
- ♦ My biggest advice is to consider continuing your education. Look forward to graduate school to better perfect your craft and prepare yourself for whatever you want to do. – Class of 2013

Don't expect it to get easier. Just expect as much as possible. — Class of 2014

Travel and Learn New Things

- ♦ I would suggest that new graduates get out of their comfort zone and travel. There is so much to learn and experience in other cities/countries. Traveling really changes one's perspective and idea of the world, plus it can also add a new language to their repertoire, which can be great for their future careers. – Class of 2011
- ♦ Learn basic HTML and CSS if you get stuck outside a humanities-centric job. They're the most common "coding" languages sought after. Seems to be a plus all over LinkedIn (not kidding). And if you have excellent writing skills as well, you'll have an edge on those who don't have a solid foundation in both disciplines. Effective writer and critical thinker = an effective communicator! – Class of 2010



I recommend that every student attend graduate school as soon as possible. Once you start a full-time job, it can get very difficult to get back into school mode. The days go by extremely quickly and before you know it (as it is in my case) three years have passed by and you still haven't applied for graduate school. Take your entrance exams right after graduation. Keep all your graded papers, as professors need them when you ask for a letter of recommendation. Cherish everything you learn from your English professors and apply it. You won't believe how much of a difference it makes to write eloquently in a job. – Class of 2012

Don't Give Up



Stay Strong – It Can Be Frustrating

- ♦ Moving out to San Francisco, I did not have a job plan. I didn't have much of a plan period. I work my butt off! I haven't had a day off in 2 months but I know that my hard work pays off. At some point I had three jobs just to support myself. But I feel that in a competitive market such as SF and media I have earned the position I have with some sleepless nights. My advice would be don't give up no matter how hard the situation. Work harder than people expect of you, and always be ten minutes early because on time means ten minutes late. – Class of 2013
- ♦ Put yourself out there. You won't get anywhere by being apathetic or taking failures and losses personally. You have to be annoying to potential employers and give them a reason to hire you. You also have to learn to be a team player and you have to know when to take shit from people or when to push back. Taking risks is also extremely important, especially that 99% of the time you're going to fail. But once in a while you succeed. – Class of 2012
- ♦ Post-college life can be stressful and depressing and it is important to absorb the negativity and address it. There is much to do with the English degree, but sometimes you need patience, luck and experience to get going. – Class of 2014
- ♦ I had somewhat of a "withdrawal" symptom after graduating from college because I enjoyed school so much, and it was hard when that part of my life went missing. I had a sense of rhythm while I was in school, balancing out studying and working part-time. I had great professors and classmates to guide and help me throughout my college years. Keeping in touch with them even after college would definitely have helped with my "withdrawal." So don't be afraid to do that even after graduating because professors are still there to help, and classmates might need your support as well. – Class of 2012
- ♦ Balance between relaxing and growing. Too often I stressed about how I'm 24 and have nothing but I'm on my way to something. It's okay not to know what's going to happen as long as you figure it out sooner rather than later. – Class of 2013

Continue reading the great novels. They will remind you why you became an English major. Although I'm not working at a place where my skills can fully blossom, reading pieces of literature motivates me to strive for my goals.
— Class of 2014

- ♦ **Patience.** It's so, so hard to find the work we think is worthy of our education. The fact that I felt compelled to leave my home country to find work abroad is telling. I always wanted to travel, but I also took this leap of faith because I felt like New York's cost of living--and the incredibly high competition for EVERY job available--made me feel unwelcomed.

After college, I worked for an office job where it was less about my English degree and more about my retail experience with security and inventory. And then when I got fed up with that, I did security to pay my bills. But while I did those, I invested a lot of my personal time working on writing projects, and I worked as both a writer and an editor for a pair of websites based on movies, gaming and the like. There was no pay at either job, only perks, but it was something to keep me invested in my craft.

When I applied to EF, it was at a point in my life where I couldn't take anymore of the working menial jobs thing and applied myself to teaching. I had previously preferred to work a writing, editing or publishing job, but those fields are oversaturated and force applicants to vie for unpaid internships. And I had no time to pursue graduate work, or so I felt. So I spent a lot of time looking and found an opportunity to teach English in China, where English is high in demand.

The company I work for was very helpful in getting me set up, and while the pay is low (less than \$20,000 a year), the cost of living is very cheap in my part of China, so the money goes far if you don't waste it all. I have some time to write, and I have plenty of time, money and resources to see new things. It's pretty nice, although work can be a pain since, like any private school or even any retail kind of job, we're often more worried about sales goals, pleasing customers (parents) and can be worked a bit hard with crazy schedules.

My advice: be patient. Expand your resume with your accomplishments in your field more so than bullet points of what you were supposed to do. Look at everything related and be flexible. And look for something that will give you fulfillment while you get paid.

While I'm out here, I haven't gotten the time I've needed to get my mind in the place I've wanted it to be, but I've had space to get to know myself a little more, I've had the resources and opportunities to see new things and experience unique events, and I've had the financial security that I haven't felt I've ever had in New York, even when I was getting paid well in my office job. We have to be flexible and willing to adapt. If not, we'll be stuck working minimum wage jobs for the rest of our lives. – Class of 2010

It's so, so hard to find the work we think is worthy of our education...be patient.

– Class of 2014

