

# Being an English Major

## Most Annoying FAQs

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Back in school, English lessons were my favorite, and while most students around me grumbled and groaned, I took a front row seat in all the classes, alert and excited. That same excitement has led me to pursue a Bachelor's Degree in English Literature and Linguistics. Though I don't expect people to share my enthusiasm, some appear to be terribly misinformed about the subject – so much so, that I intend to set them straight.

### Oh, an English major! So you want to be a teacher, eh?

Most people feel that “teaching” is synonymous with “English major” – not in the sense that teaching is a viable option, but in the sense that it is the *only* option. What they fail to understand is the versatility of the English major which allows them to fit in seamlessly almost anywhere where creative work is involved. They can opt for jobs as copywriters, work with the media, or be journalists – and that's just off of the top of my head. The idea that teaching is the sole profession of all English majors is a primitive one, but even so, what's wrong with being a teacher?

### Do English majors “learn” English?

A majority of students pursuing majors in English do so under the assumption that they will learn English, from the ground up. I regret to say that this is not how it works. Your teachers will not teach you the basics of the language, because they expect students to know the language and the culture that is associated with it. What they will teach you is the finer details, incorporating technical jargon and theories of linguists (Noam Chomsky, anyone?). You will also learn the art of critiquing and analyzing characters, stories and situations, particularly in your Literature courses. If your aim is to learn English, then taking IELTS classes is enough.

### English majors have it easy.

People have flaunted their graphs and diagrams in front of me, stressing on the difficulty and complexity of their subjects, all the while hinting not-so-subtly how I have a much easier life, because what's there to study for English, anyway? If any of you potential English majors think the same way, and intend to study this subject in the hopes of breezing through your semesters, I have news for you. The amount of reading and writing you will have to do will surpass your greatest nightmares. You will be expected to be well-read, and keep up with current events, history and developments in other fields of studies, all of which will play a

part in classroom discussions, thereby affecting your grade. You have to be alert and self-dependent – you cannot skip a Literature class and go through someone else's notes, because everyone has a different interpretation of literary texts. The workload is immense and it never stops.

**I AM A  
STRONG  
INDEPENDENT  
ENGLISH MAJOR  
AND I DON'T NEED  
NO MATH.**

### So you've read everything, eh?

People expect English majors to have swallowed and memorised the dictionary for reasons completely unknown to me. They will give gasps of surprise when you are unable to explain a word, however obscure it may be, and will take it for granted that you have read and loved every single classic ever written. While English majors are obliged to read more than students pursuing other degrees, it is silly to expect them to have read all of Dickens' or Austen's works. It is also unfair to assume that all students of literature love *Wuthering Heights* or *Pride and Prejudice* (which are not written by the same author, by the way). Literature/Linguistics students do not possess eidetic memories, so throwing random words at them to explain for you is not polite, and neither are your eye-rolls when they fail to define “alektorophobia” or some other bizarre word you come across in your questionable readings.

### You are a whiz with English assignments.

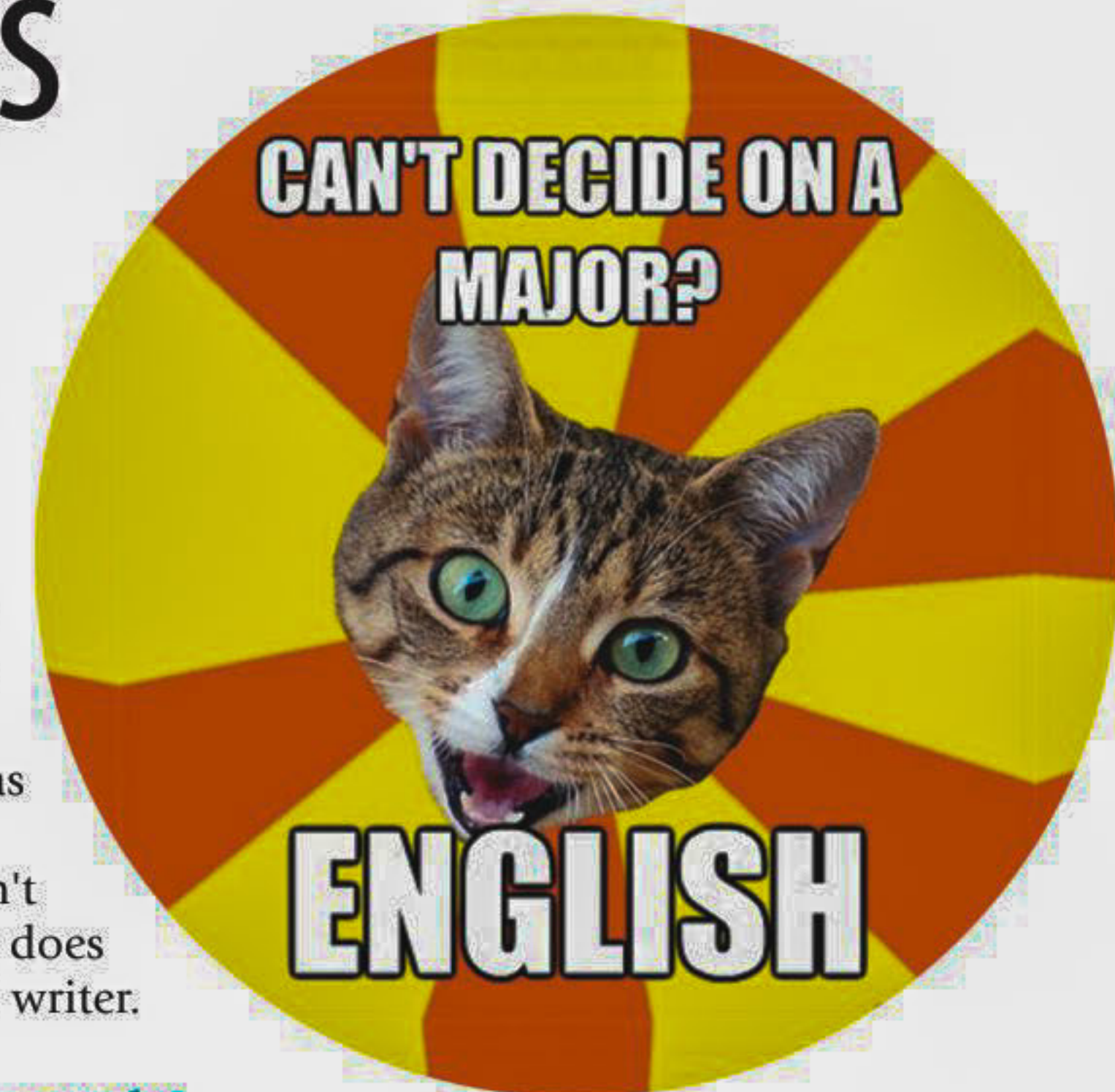
My friends have come to me, begging me to write applications and essays, all because I am an English major. Their insistence that I do their assignments would make one think that I hold all the knowledge in

the world regarding the Art of Written Applications. Grudges have been held against me for refusing to help friends with assignments, even though I knew I would be hopeless at them. Their expectations will go beyond your abilities and to the point where they feel you can write a paper on rocket science, as long as the language is English. Such hopes and reality often don't match, because studying English does not necessarily make one a good writer.

### Literature = Shakespearean novels?

A very blatantly wrong assumption people make is that Shakespeare is literature. He is it; there are no other playwrights, novelists, poets – nothing. Names like Chaucer, Tennyson, Eliot, Keats, Byron, Austen, etc. escape their knowledge completely. While Shakespeare is a very important figure in English literature, it is ignorant to assume that he makes up all of it. People have even used the words interchangeably, and if you plan on majoring in “Shakespeare”, think again, because you will have to deal with a lot more than just his plays and sonnets.

Also, Shakespeare did NOT write



novels. Not all works of literature are novels. Just no.

After reading this you will hopefully have had some of your more illogical impressions about English majors corrected. Hopefully. <3

