

A close-up photograph of a fountain pen with a gold nib and a wooden barrel, resting on a dark, textured surface.

**Securing Your
University Offer for
English**

Essay Competition Award Ceremony
13 April 2023

Agenda

- Welcome
- Studying English at University: an Overview
- Submitting a Competitive Application
- NU London Insights
- Q&A

Studying English at University: An Overview





What is the study of English?

- Exciting opportunity to read widely, and think critically, across a range of texts, genres, authors and periods
- Courses vary widely - some take a chronological approach; others thematic
- English-language texts - but may include non-British English texts (e.g.: American or Canadian writers)
- May include literary criticism/theory - how other critics have responded to literature
- Typically offers more flexibility for independent study and personal choice than at A Level
- Develop your writing skills through independent analysis and criticism



Where and how can you study English?

- Single Honours BA English Literature
- Many joint and combined honours options, e.g.: English and Art History, English and Education, English with Creative Writing (*note that the study balance is likely to be other than 50/50 if it's English *with* rather than English *and*)
- Option to study literature beyond England within the degree
- Option to study ancient literature, e.g.: Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic Literature
- Different degree spans (standard English 3 years, standard Scottish 4 years, fast-track 2 years etc)
- Degree apprenticeships take a more practical approach (potentially useful to fast track toward particular careers)
- Full-time/part-time; online/in-person; study abroad (especially when course includes another country's literature)

How is English taught?

- **Reading:** You will read extensively, independently, and may also read and analyse set readings to further develop your skills of close reading and critical analysis
- **Lectures:** Lecturers can discuss the set reading and analyse various texts, as well as provide further context to literature (e.g.: historical or social)
- **Seminars:** Seminars allow for a more in-depth discussion of a topic and a chance to ask any questions to your lecturer/seminar supervisor. It's probably even more important that you are well prepared for the seminar as you will need to participate
- **Essays:** Formative and summative, to allow you to construct and articulate your own independent arguments and convey your analysis of texts
- **Presentations:** Occasionally presentations are used to assess how well you understand a topic - these may be individual or group presentations



What skills do you develop?

- Essay writing
- Critical thinking
- Research
- Planning
- Analysis
- Creative writing
- Time management
- Referencing skills

The skills you will acquire as an English graduate will allow you to pivot flexibly into a variety of industries, when you enter the working world.

What can you do after your degree?

As an English graduate your transferable skills can take you into ANY industry. Some of the top graduate destinations are:

- Education
- Wholesale and retail
- Information and communication
- Professional and scientific
- Accommodation and food services

A modern office interior featuring a long row of orange, curved chairs on the left. In the center, a staircase with yellow carpeting and a glass railing leads down. To the right, there is a glass-walled office space with a desk and a monitor. The ceiling has a grid pattern with recessed lighting. A large white text box is overlaid on the top left.

Submitting a Competitive Application for English

What are the entry requirements?



Information provided by ucas.com

- **A levels:** Usually minimum two A levels, with three A levels and A-B grades are required for the most popular courses
- Entry requirements range from CCC to AAB
- English A level may be required
- Other useful subjects to hold for English degrees include any other humanities subject
- **International Baccalaureate Diploma:** From 30-39 points overall
- **Scottish Highers:** From BBBB to AABBB (most frequently AABBB)
- **UCAS Tariff:** 140-112 (often not accepted)
- **Access to HE Diploma:** 60-30 overall credits
- **Cambridge Pre-U:** M3-D2



What are admissions tutors looking for?

- Enthusiasm and motivation to study English
- Appetite to read widely, and to read across all genres
- Credible evidence that supports your subject passion
- Proactive subject exploration and engagement - e.g.: wider reading beyond the set texts
- Relevant extra-curricular/super-curricular activities
- Interests outside of school, relating to English
- Relevant and transferable work experience
- Aims and goals; career plans if known
- Understanding of the demands of studying at university, and how this is different from school

What super-curricular activities would support my application?

Super-curricular activities take the subjects you study further, beyond what you have learnt at school or college. Some examples for English may include:

- Wider reading beyond the set texts
- Reading specialist magazines and journals
- Attending university taster lectures or taster days
- Listening to podcasts, TED talks or online lectures
- Attending an English Summer School
- Taking an online (MOOC) English course
- Watching plays at the theatre/cinema/online
- Watching film, theatre or dance adaptations of texts
- Taking part in university essay competitions!



Why is the personal statement so important?

- Often your only chance to 'sell yourself' to the university and impress the admissions tutor
- Helps to differentiate between equally excellent candidates with similar or identical grade profiles, especially for competitive courses
- Helps if you are a borderline candidate
- Demonstrates your reasons for applying for a course
- May form basis of an interview - tutors may ask questions arising from the statement
- May help if on results day you don't quite make your grades

How can I write a compelling personal statement?

- Invest plenty of time in the brainstorming/thinking stage, before starting to write your statement
- Structure your personal statement
- Use positive and enthusiastic language
- Make every sentence count - word count is tight!
- Ensure it reflects your 'voice', and your 'journey'
- Use evidence to support claims/statements
- Be prepared to draft and redraft
- Be honest - don't exaggerate and don't plagiarise
- Double check grammar and spelling for errors
- Ask for support, especially with proofreading and checking - it's easy for mistakes to slip through!





What might an admissions interview look like?

- Unique opportunity to discuss a subject you are passionate about with an academic tutor
- Opportunity for tutor to get to know you and your motivation for applying - you can also ask questions!
- May take the form of a 'taster' tutorial
- Unlikely to be a test of knowledge - tutor will be more interested in how you think, rather than what you know
- Discussion-based; questions will probe your subject interest, enthusiasm and aptitude
- Questions may build on your personal statement
- Questions will be challenging - don't panic if you don't immediately have an answer; take your time to think
- Some interviews may include a task, or pre-reading

How can I prepare for my admissions interview?



- Carefully reread your personal statement, and be prepared to expand upon any of the points you have included
- Re-read or re-familiarise yourself with any texts you referenced, so these are fresh in your mind
- Undertake any reading or pre-interview tasks in good time
- Practice talking about the points in your statement
- Research who will be interviewing you
- Make sure you are clear regarding interview logistics
- If you will be undertaking a virtual interview, make sure you have somewhere suitable for this task, with good wifi
- Prepare questions you would like to ask in the interview

NU London Insights



Faculty insights

- We live in a world increasingly filled with texts, written information, images, and language, and English as a degree subject provides the best grounding in the ways to interpret and move through the profusion. It helps, too, to look back at the literature of the past as we try to learn how to move through the world
- The most valuable trait of an English student is a passion for reading
- In your personal statement, try to explain why you love particular books: these shouldn't necessarily be books you've been told to read, or set to study at school, but books you have felt a deep and personal connection to
- When preparing for an admissions interview, read as widely as possible: it matters less what you read than that you read
- English graduates are sought after by any profession that relies upon the interpretation and presentation of arguments and ideas

Student tips and hints

- Be willing to go beyond your comfort zone and read across all genres: poetry, prose and drama
- No reading is ever wasted, and will always ultimately be beneficial - think about the interconnections and influences between texts and authors, that create a 'spider web' of literature
- Try to read texts for the first time before term time, especially long Victorian novels, as it can be hard to read and critique these in a short space of time
- Your first few essays won't be your best, but persevere - you will improve with regular practice
- Try to see drama being performed - cheap London theatre tickets are amazing!
- [The British Library](#) is a handy resource



Suggestions for wider reading

- Brontë, E (2009) ***Wuthering Heights***. Oxford: Oxford University Press (first published 1847)
- Conrad, J (1994), ***Heart of Darkness***. London: Penguin Classics (first published 1899)
- Defoe, D (2003), ***A Journal of the Plague Year***. London: Penguin Classics (first published 1722)
- Prebble, L (2012), ***The Effect***. Yorkshire: Methuen Drama
- Rankine, C (2014), ***Citizen: An American Lyric***. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press
- Shakespeare, W (2008), ***Henry V***. Oxford: Oxford University Press (first published 1600)
- Shapiro, J (2006) ***1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare***. London: Faber and Faber
- Smith, E (2019), ***This is Shakespeare***. New York: Pantheon Books

Q&A

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