Why English Majors are the Hot New Hires

After years of emphasis being put on math and engineering degrees, here's why English majors may be in high demand.

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Years ago while interviewing an English major, I mentioned that—for many reasons—we should stop hiring individuals who have a degree in the humanities. When I finished speaking, the applicant was slightly choked up. He said, "You are the only person who has no good about my degree." It's not uncommon for English majors—or anyone majoring in the humanities for that matter—to get a bad rap. Even Marc Andreessen, founder of Netscape, too long ago said that people should get math-oriented degrees; otherwise, they'll be working in shoe stores.

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We place a great value on a STEM education (degrees in science, technology, eng mathematics). But are the tables turning? Are hiring managers beginning to see t a liberal arts education—and an English major in particular—brings to the workpl: Recently, some high-profile businesspeople came out in favor of hiring English m: Bestselling author and small-business expert Steve Strauss, for example, has adr "English majors are my employee of choice." And Bracken Darrell, CEO of Logitec say: "When I look at where our business is going, I think, boy, you do need to have technical understanding somewhere in there, to be relevant. But you’re really diff you understand humanities."

The Popularity of English Majors

Employers are looking to hire English majors because these applicants bring a set businesses need:

**Communication skills:** In a recent Job Outlook Survey, employers rated the "abilit communicate with persons inside and outside the organization” as the most imp candidate skill. Communication is at the heart of any business. Everything that h organization requires communication. This is one of the areas in which English m. They have learned to speak well; they are well-read and have an extensive vocabu spend years learning how to present a thesis coherently, and how to construct an and they are trained to debate and defend their point of view logically. Bringing ar major to the fold is a much needed salve for organizations today, where poor cor skills are the norm rather than the exception.

**Writing skills:** A Metlife survey found that 97 percent of business executives rate as very important. English majors—perhaps more than any other major—are trai well. A major part of what business owners do to gain clients has to do with writin it’s writing an advertisement or a marketing brochure, a good sales letter or an en campaign. Businesses also need people who can create powerful content for the blog, develop a strong social media presence and craft a compelling description c and services for the company website. Even companies that conduct their sales c or use telemarketers need to start with a good script. The ROI of writing is invalu business.

**Researching skills:** All business owners need to stay current on changes and deve their field. They also need to have absolute accuracy in any communications with
Having someone on staff who excels in conducting research is a very viable asset majors are drilled in conducting in-depth research.

**Critical thinking skills:** The ability to analyze an issue and question assumptions a kinds of information in a business setting. English majors are taught to deconstruct analyze a problem, and package their conclusion so others can understand their I thought. These are highly transferable skills that are vital for the success of a bus

**Empathy:** More and more, businesses are recognizing the importance of empathy workplace. In *The 'Soft Skill' That Pays $100,000+*, author George Anders discover 1,000 listings for highly paid jobs where employers list empathy as a necessary q And these were not just jobs in traditionally compassionate sectors, such as health nonprofits; they included companies in technology, finance, consulting and aero name a few. Think Microsoft, Dell, Raytheon, Symantec, Pfizer and McKinsey.

There are numerous studies that correlate empathy with increased sales, with the performing managers of product development teams and with greater efficiency increasingly diverse workforce. Empathy is indeed the oil that keeps relationships smoothly. Dan Pink, in *A Whole Mind: Why Right Brainers Will Rule The Future*, lists that are vital for success in the new economy market—one of these is empathy. A you can’t outsource empathy, or automate it. You need to have empathic people in organization.

How does this relate to English majors? A University of Toronto study on the effect literature on empathy shows that those who read fiction frequently have higher levels cognitive empathy; i.e., the ability to understand how another person feels. Keith the researchers, said the reason fiction improves empathy is because it helps us to "understand characters' actions from their interior point of view, by entering into situations and minds, rather than the more exterior view of them that we usually I improves interpersonal understanding and enhances relationships with customer business associates. When you hire an English major, you're likely hiring someone cognitive empathy to the table.

**The Beginning of a Trend**

So is a wider range of employers recognizing the value of a liberal arts education? pattern," says Dr. Jane Robbins of the University of Arizona, "of employers asking liberal-arts training for all kinds of professions—engineering, medicine, the law, a
management." She adds, "Many people may not know that philosophy and English biology, are common undergraduate majors for physicians."

David Boyes, CEO of Sine Nomine, a technology consulting company, says, “We deal with mono-focused people. We need well-rounded people.” His company puts all new hires through a one-year training program that covers the basics—like how to write an effective document—and includes some philosophy and history.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities conducted a recent survey of employers want from new hires. Its survey report, It Takes More Than a Major: En Priorities for College Learning and Student Success, shows that more than half of chief executives want college graduates to have not only field-specific knowledge and a broad range of skills and knowledge. They place less value on the undergraduate degree more on a capacity to think critically, communicate clearly and solve complex problems. The trend in the interview, Debra Humphreys, vice president at The AACU, said that the economic impact of the COVID-19 has “put a premium on college graduates who are really multifaceted ... people with broad knowledge and skills, as well as field-specific skills.” According to Humphreys, the concern has intensified over the years.

What Does This Trend Mean for You?

The trend of employers looking for both field-specific skills and broad skills indicates that employees who combine a liberal arts major—especially an English major—with a degree, such as business, science or technology, will have a competitive advantage. Businesses continue to look for candidates who can bridge the gap between the two worlds, and hire such individuals, they will no doubt have an impact on the workplace by creating more diversity in an organization.

All companies can benefit from having a mix of left-brained and right-brained individuals. Take IDEO, one of the most innovative companies in the world: One of the company’s core values for innovation at IDEO is having extremely diversified teams solve problems that are traditionally handled by monolithic groups, such as just engineers or just designers. IDEO’s innovation teams include 10 different types. One of these is The Caregiver, who empowers empathy to understand each individual customer and create a relationship; another is The Storyteller, who captures the imagination with compelling narratives in whatever fits the message: video, animation, even comic strips.

As a business owner, you could gain an edge in the global marketplace and be better positioned for success with such multifaceted individuals in your camp. Have you
English major yet?

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Bruna Martinuzzi is the founder of Clarion Enterprises Ltd., and the author of two Presenting with Credibility: Practical Tools and Techniques for Effective Presenter Leader as a Mensch: Become the Kind of Person Others Want to Follow.

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Joseph L. Rosenberg CPA-Owner, Joseph L. Rosenberg CPA

My son is studying engineering in grad school while also making presentations to the faculty and his peers so needed experience in both areas.

Ryan Barley Research Assistant, American Institute of Physics
I have a BA in English, and a BS in physics (from a liberal arts college, at that), but have still found myself essentially working at a shoe store. What companies/job titles should I be looking for to be able to leverage me dual expertise?

David Pennington  
Managing Editor, Category Manager, Denver Off The Wagon

Came by this link via Tumblr and I thought it was the perfect allegory. STEM degrees might make the infrastructure of Tumblr, but the humanities degrees make all the content ON Tumblr that makes it a billion dollar product.

Bernice Kao  
Creator, Myjobtalk.org

I remember in the eighties, major banks prefer having English majors to train and groom them to be leaders. English Major from National Taiwan University, I had to switch my major to library science to have any prospect of being hired. Both my daughters and my husband are engineers. They never had any employment problems. Fortunate daughters are gainfully employed with good jobs. Their communication skills in writing and presentation were being engineering majors. I believe it's the person, not the major that'll determine one's success. I am a retired coach librarian. My passions stay in Toastmaster and writing memoirs. I continue to use the writing/present my job search class.

Rajeev Gupta  
Business Development, Wilderness Media & Entertainment

While I appreciate humanities, I also appreciate science and mathematics. I refuse to believe that situation is hopeless.

Bruna Martinuzzi  
Presentation Skills Training, Clarion Enterprises Ltd.

Craig, thank you for your comment. I couldn't agree more about the importance of writing and public speaking to communicate appears at the top of lists of what employers are looking for today. With the addition of technology, how can you lose? Your son is well positioned for success. :-)

Craig McBreen  
Principal, McBreen Design, Inc.

Hi Bruna, My youngest son and I were talking about this the other day. He loves to write and I keep telling him one practice that will help him more than anything else ... the art of communication. The other thing I like is that...
focusing more on presentation skills much earlier in school. I only wish I had learned public speaking at an earlier age. Combining this with effective written communication is golden. Oh, and learning a little code wouldn't be a bad idea.

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