

Who Would Major In English?

A Few Successful English Majors, a list compiled by the Mississippi State English Department

Rumor has it that a Humanities degree of any variety is a ticket to the breadline, and a degree in English is of particularly low value in the real world. We would like to suggest that is just not true, and suggest that the student of English may find him or herself in a position to pursue any of a long list of particularly desirable career options.

University professors are not the most well-known celebrities, but knowledgeable people are likely to be familiar with scholars like **Henry Louis Gates, Jr.**, **Steven Greenblat** or **Harold Bloom**. Less well-known professors do hold prestigious academic positions and many earn a quite reasonable salary.

As might be expected, a large number of writers hold degrees in English. The list includes

- **Douglas Adams:** SciFi writer; wrote *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* series; *Dirk Gently* series
- **Gwendolyn Brooks:** poems include "We Real Cool"
- **Tom Clancy:** suspense writer; *Clear and Present Danger*
- **Allen Ginsberg:** Beat Generation poet; poems include *Howl*
- **Joseph Heller:** author of *Catch-22*
- **David Henry Hwang:** author of *Madame Butterfly*
- **Stephen King:** extraordinarily successful and prolific author of horror fiction; writings range from *Carrie* through *The Green Mile* and *The Stand* to the short story on which the movie "Stand by Me" is based
- **Bobbie Ann Mason:** short story writer; collections include *Shiloh*
- **Arthur Miller:** playwright most noted for *Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible*
- **Toni Morrison:** author of *Beloved*
- **Joyce Carol Oates:** prolific author
- **Philip Roth:** esteemed Jewish author
- **Amy Tan:** author of *The Joy Luck Club*
- **John Updike:** most noted for the "Rabbit" books, from *Run, Rabbit, Run* to *Rabbit at Rest*
- **Eudora Welty:** highly esteemed southern author

Then there are those who have majored in English who have made non-traditional use of their degrees. Their occupations range from actors to financiers, business executives, and attorneys. Our list includes

- **Russell Baker:** journalist
- **Dave Barry:** humorist, writer, actor
- **Linda Bloodworth-Thomason:** television writer/producer (*Designing Women*, *Evening Shade*)
- **Carol Browner:** former Head of the Environmental Protection Agency
- **Chevy Chase:** comedian, actor, writer

- **Mario Cuomo:** former Governor of New York
- **John Cuzack:** actor
- **David Duchovny:** actor
- **Michael Eisner:** former Walt Disney CEO
- **Jodie Foster:** actor, filmmaker
- **Kathryn Fuller:** World Wildlife Fund CEO
- **Cathy Guisewite:** cartoonist (Cathy)
- **Famke Janssen:** actor
- **Tommy Lee Jones:** actor
- **Kris Kristofferson:** songwriter, actor
- **Michael Lynne:** Co-Chairman and Co-CEO of New Line Cinema
- **Paul Newman:** actor, food entrepreneur
- **Joe Paterno:** football coach (Penn State University)
- **Hank Paulson:** Treasury Secretary and former Chairman and CEO of Goldman Sachs
- **Sally Ride:** astronaut
- **Joan Rivers:** comedienne
- **Mitt Romney:** former governor of Massachusetts and former CEO of Bain Capital
- **Diane Sawyer:** broadcast journalist
- **Herb Scannell:** President, Nickelodeon Networks, MTV Networks Group President
- **Paul Simon:** songwriter, singer
- **Steven Spielberg:** filmmaker
- **Marty Schottenheimer:** former coach of San Diego Chargers
- **Christopher Reeve:** late actor, activist for the disabled
- **Clarence Thomas:** U.S. Supreme Court Justice
- **Emma Thompson:** actor
- **Grant Tinker:** TV Executive and Producer
- **Harold Varmus:** Nobel laureate in medicine, former Director of National Institutes of Health
- **Barbara Walters:** broadcast journalist
- **Sigourney Weaver:** actor
- **Pete Wilson:** former Governor of California
- **Bob Woodward:** journalist, wrote *All the President's Men*
- **Renee Zellweger:** actor

<http://www.english.msstate.edu/undergrad/EnCelebs.html>

from Mississippi State University