

First Day Follies!

For this class: Interview a classmate, someone you do not know. Ask them the following, record their responses, introduce them to the class:

- 1) Name and name by which they'd like to be referred?
- 2) Where are you from? And, what is your major?
- 3) Place of employment? Number of hours per week devoted to work?
- 4) If you were stuck on a desert island and could only order one meal and one special person to deliver it, what would you order and who would be your waiter/waitress?
- 5) Favorite body part? ☺
- 6) Place you've always wanted to visit?
- 7) Something in the news that makes you angry and why?
- 8) If you could add three hours to any day of the week to do anything you wanted, what day would it be and what would you do?
- 9) If you had a choice to be reincarnated for a day as one particular piece of technology, machine, or piece of equipment, what would it be and why?
- 10) Do you like English? Why or why not?
- 11) Do you think writing will be relevant to your life and/or work? How?
- 12) Come up with your own question.

English 101 sections:

- **For the next class:** Read the article below on *The Science of Writing Well is in Big Demand at Workplaces*. Write 500 words on what you think the Oscar Wilde quote used in the article “If you cannot write well, you cannot think well; if you cannot think well, others will do your thinking for you” means. Also read, *College kids — and their parents — think a humanities degree is useless. But businesses want students who can write and think critically*. **Share this article with both or one of your parents.** Be prepared to discuss the Wilde quote in class along with what you think your future employer is looking for?
- **For the following class,** from the website www.writingforstem.com, make copies of and read the following:
 - Master English 101 STEM syllabus 2021;
 - APA Style Sheet;
 - Under “Course Materials”: *Still Life; Dangerous Game; Why Football Matters; I Need My Brain*.

English 102 sections:

- **For the next class:** Read the article below on *The Science of Writing Well is in Big Demand at Workplaces*. Write 500 words on what you think the Oscar Wilde quote used in the article “If you cannot write well, you cannot think well; if you cannot think well, others will do your thinking for you” means. Also read, *College kids — and their parents — think a humanities degree is useless. But businesses want students who can write and think critically*. **Share this article with both or one of your parents.** Be prepared to discuss the Wilde quote in class along with what you think your future employer is looking for?
- **For the following class,** from the website www.writingforstem.com, make copies of and read the following:
 - Master English 102 STEM Syllabus 2021;
 - APA Style Sheet;
 - On the 2nd page under “Course Materials”: *Mirror Neurons & Milgram Obedience Experiment*.

The science of writing well is in big demand at workplaces, [Raja Muhammad Atif Azad](#)

If you cannot write well, you cannot think well; if you cannot think well, others will do your thinking for you.” That quote from Oscar Wilde eloquently sums up the fact that our writing reflects our thoughts, and that reflection magnifies the gaps in our thinking. We have a choice then: Rethink critically and refine our ideas if we wish to influence others, or close our eyes and lose the world to someone else. Essentially, then, writing provides us with an anvil to hammer our thoughts out before they can shine the world.

Globally, modern employers are echoing those words of Oscar Wilde: they want to hire graduates who can write coherently and think creatively. In fact, the lack of professional writing skills is one of the biggest gaps in workplace readiness. Burning Glass Technologies, which mines job advertisements across various job sectors to find sought-after skills, stresses that writing and other communication skills that are in high demand can be difficult to find.

These job sectors also include popular scientific fields such as medicine, engineering and information technology. Despite often being high achievers during their school years, many entrants remain so engrossed in honing their technical skills that they ignore other skills that make them well-rounded professionals. Knowledge of writing is thus limited to possessing just enough skills to get by.

Knowing “enough” is not enough though. Birmingham Skills Investment Plan (2016-2026) highlights the lack of writing ability as a key deficiency in the skill sets of job applicants in Britain’s second-largest city.

Likewise, the National Commission of Writing reported that even as far back as 2004, the American blue chips were spending an estimated \$3.1 billion to train their employees on how to write clearly. That one needs to learn how to write may surprise — even offend — many after doing all the hard yards at school. However, the purpose of all that writing, particularly technical writing, was to explain or demonstrate our understanding to an examiner who was paid to read it.

In contrast, in the professional world, the writer competes for the reader’s attention, so the writing must make sense. With no physical gestures to explain the writer’s mind, writing failures can delay or scupper the desired outcomes. On a lighter note, Urdu poetry also warns that failures in romantic writing can cost dearly. Fortunately, writing effectively goes by the name of scientific writing. It is a consolidated set of rules that can help anyone — students, teachers, professionals or newspaper writers — write clearly.

The mantra of scientific writing is: Simple sentences are powerful. For example, consider the following two alternative statements: “The recession had X saving us millions” or “X saved us millions during the recession”. The first sentence highlights “recession”; X’s impact is a mere consequence. The second sentence directly states the intention. The rule is: Identify the topic and put it in the subject.

Another rule is to convey actions via verbs. Take “the heart rate increased” versus “there was an increase in the heart rate”. Both state the same but the first statement is direct and briefer because it conveys the action with a verb; while the second statement is longer and requires a helper verb. Long sentences produce long documents, which take longer to read — hardly a recipe for inviting attention. Moreover, synonyms can obstruct clarity when communicating specialised knowledge to someone not quite from the same discipline. Synonyms beautify writing if they make sense readily, but they do not do so with specialised terminology. Therefore, scientific writing prescribes that one must clearly define the interchangeable terms before using them. Even so, using far too many terms for the same thing can confuse the reader.

Along with several other easily learnable rules, scientific writing ensures that the information is conveyed precisely, concisely and consistently to the readers who are not as familiar with the subject matter as the writer. Clearly, a scientist who wishes to influence the society or a business that aims to woo new clientele can appreciate this advice.

To conclude, I rephrase Julian Treasure’s words from his TED Talk. This is where we are right now: We do not write well for the people who do not understand us very well. What would the world be like if we were writing powerfully for the people who were reading consciously? That would be a world where understanding will be a norm, and that is an idea worth spreading.

College kids — and their parents — think a humanities degree is useless. But businesses want students who can write and think critically.

The humanities are dying. Each year brings ever more dire statistics — the number of students majoring in history, for instance, is down 45 percent from its 2007 peak. The number of English majors has plummeted since 1997, down by nearly half. As a newly minted, newly employed doctor of the humanities, it feels like I'm in academia's version of a Blockbuster video store circa 2010.

As you might guess, scores of concerned university professors constantly debate how to save the humanities, or even whether there's any point. Five years ago Benjamin Schmidt, a history professor at Northeastern University, wrote an article arguing that “the [‘Humanities in crisis’](#) story is seriously overstated.” Recently, he offered a kind of [mea culpa](#), citing data showing continued declines in the number of humanities majors, even as the economy recovers. The reasons are myriad, but Schmidt argues that students are choosing majors they think will lead to more bountiful and lucrative careers, even though jobs data doesn't support the belief that humanities majors have far fewer job prospects and earn significantly less pay.

What is true is that there is a high demand for specific skill-based jobs in STEM fields, and a persistent perception that humanities degrees do not prepare students for these jobs. This isn't all wrong: an English major just out of college is obviously less qualified than an engineering major for a job as an engineer.

But the skills argument — misconception — is nothing new. When I wanted to major in English in college nearly 20 years ago, my mom was incredulous. Here I was, about to be the first in my family to attend college, and Mom was sure studying English would waste my chance at a good job. She wanted to know about my job prospects, so we went right to the source. I'll never forget the awe and trepidation I felt sitting across the desk from Dr. Ann Ferguson, then chairwoman of the English department and the very picture of the wise old owl professor. As we sat in her dimly lit office, surrounded by bookshelves that looked as if they would buckle under the weight of her library, my mom asked her what I could actually do with an English major. She answered — to my joy and my mother's chagrin — “Anything he wants.”

Well, yes and no. I have plenty of fellow English-major friends who went into other fields — public affairs, broadcasting, advertising — and who would surely say that the skills they learned in reading critically and writing persuasively have helped them. But they probably would have been better off minoring in English and choosing majors in their eventual fields. For my part, I only ever wanted to write and teach. I've spent the better part of two decades in and out of graduate school, patching together a living as an adjunct professor and freelance writer while I pursued my goal of being a college professor. This past September, I became an assistant professor of humanities/general education at Regis College. Note that I was hired to teach general education courses in the humanities — this semester my courses are ethics, religious studies, and English — not courses in my specialty, American literary journalism.

My position might just represent a way forward for the humanities. People still need to study literature, philosophy, religion, and history, and there's no shortage of think pieces coming out of the business world suggesting that “humanities and business go hand in hand,” as a writer in the *Globe* opined in 2016. I often hear this, but I thought it was something successful people would say so I wouldn't feel bad about my English degree. Then I found myself in a conversation with a hedge fund manager and an accountant, fathers of a couple of my daughter's classmates. After they asked me what I did, I got to hear firsthand about the scourge of cookie-cutter MBAs, and why their fields need people who understand ethics and can write. Ethical judgment and effective writing are two of the seven most important skills businesses want, according to a recent report from the [Association of American Colleges & Universities](#).

Future stockbrokers and engineers of the world still need to know how to make good choices, read critically, and write clearly. But beyond these skills, studying the humanities makes one a better person, in possession of greater emotional intelligence and empathy — attributes that, like humanities professorships, feel like they are in short supply these days.

So, we still need the humanities. But my colleagues and I have to stop worrying about how many undergraduates are willing to horrify their parents by majoring in something so supposedly useless as English. Instead, let's work to further integrate ourselves into the core curricula — if Rosie wants to be an engineer, she

should major in engineering. But she should also be required to take my ethics course, and probably my rhetoric course, too. Also, I'd be happy to act as an adviser on her senior project.

This will create the dual benefit of imparting the skills that employers want as well as the values they expect from their employees. I don't have to understand business-speak to know this is what you'd call a win-win.

Jonathan D. Fitzgerald is a writer and assistant professor at Regis College. Send comments to magazine@globe.com. Get the best of the magazine's award-winning stories and features right in your e-mail inbox every Sunday. [Sign up here.](#)

Employment for Humanities Majors is On Par with Math & Sciences on Hound.com

>PRWEB.COM Newswire, Pasadena, CA (PRWEB) July 05, 2013

A recent survey by Georgetown University found that employment rates for college grads with humanities majors was on par with those in the math and computer fields. The report reflected hiring on Hound.com, where many jobs continue to value and require the broad-based skills emphasized in liberal arts programs, such as reading, writing, and communication. (Hound.com is a job search site based in Pasadena, CA. It is a part of the Employment Research Institute and is owned by A. Harrison Barnes.)

Key Findings from 2013 Survey of Employers

Source: Hart Research Associates. It Takes More Than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success (Washington, DC: AAC&U, 2013), www.aacu.org/leap/public_opinion_research.cfm

- **Innovation a Priority:** 95% of employers say they give hiring preference to college graduates with skills that enable them to contribute to innovation in the workplace.
- **It Takes More than a Major:** 93% of employers say that a demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than a candidate's undergraduate major. More than 75% want higher education to place more emphasis on critical thinking, complex problem solving, written and oral communication, and applied knowledge.
- **Broad Learning is Expected:** 80% of employers agree that, regardless of their major, all college students should acquire broad knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences.
- **Students Need Liberal and Applied Learning:** Employers strongly endorse educational practices that involve students in active, effortful work—practices including collaborative problem solving, research, internships, senior projects, and community engagements.
- **E-Portfolios Would Add Value:** 83% of employers say an electronic portfolio would be useful to indicate that job applicants have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed.