

## Should I get an MA in English?

“I love interpreting texts and want to expand my knowledge and skills.”

Getting an MA in English is a great way to delve more deeply into the study of texts -- be they fictional, rhetorical, filmic, old, new, esoteric or popular. An MA trains you in research skills you can use to make exciting discoveries about the past and present; you will also hone your analytical and writing abilities and learn to engage persuasively in current scholarly discussions and theoretical debates. And, of course, through your studies you will greatly expand your knowledge of all aspects of literary culture.

The [faculty](#) of PSU’s English Department are internationally-recognized scholars who share a deep commitment to teaching and mentoring students. We approach the field of English from a variety of perspectives -- including historical, cultural, ethnic, gender, media and rhetorical studies -- and encourage our students to investigate their current interests and cultivate new ones as they explore this exciting and evolving field.

“I want to work on my writing.”

As an MA student, you will work closely with professors to fine-tune your writing. Our focus is scholarly discourse: building persuasive interpretations. But to earn a degree students can take up to 3 courses devoted exclusively to writing in a variety of genres such as expository essay or poetry. If you would like to focus more directly on writing or develop other types of skills beyond academic writing, consider applying for our [MA/MS in Writing](#) or our [MFA in Creative Writing](#).

“I hope to teach high school language arts.”

An MA in English will enhance your ability to teach critical thinking and writing in the high school English classroom. In addition to offering a range of courses on literature, film, and other creative media, we have a strong curriculum of rhetoric and composition courses, including [English 513: Teaching and Tutoring Writing](#). We can also provide you with [opportunities to teach and tutor](#) through our GA, WIC, EA, and University Studies Mentor programs, as well as through teaching practicums with faculty.

The MA alone does not, however, license you to teach high school. To obtain a license, you will have to complete a separate graduate teacher education program, such as [PSU’s GTEP program](#). See our [MA Handbook](#) for advice on how to combine GTEP training with a Masters in English.

Students interested in pursuing high school teaching should consider whether they are willing to move outside the area for a job. Job availability in Portland, as in other popular metro areas, is tight. To get a sense of what statewide job availability is like, check out the website for the [Oregon Labor Market Information System](#). Also think about setting up informational interviews at local high schools and education programs to get a better sense of employment opportunities.

“I am a high school teacher and would like to enhance my credentials.”

We especially encourage high school teachers to apply to our program. We offer evening and summer courses to accommodate your schedules, and we provide a curriculum designed to enrich your knowledge and mastery of the field. You can apply up to 12 credits of graduate education courses you have already taken toward earning your MA in English from PSU (provided these credits are no more than 7 years old and have not been used toward another degree). Many school districts will also fund your MA education.

“I want to work in the publishing field.”

Graduates of our English MA program have gone on to work for major publishers and even to found their own presses. While an MA in English will help you develop your analytical and editing skills, if you wish to get more hands-on experience in the field you may want to consider applying to PSU’s [MA/MS in Publishing](#).

“I want to work in public relations, advertising, or arts administration.”

If you wish to work in a field that demands a combination of writing skills and cultural savvy, an MA in English may be perfect for you. Many of our graduates have gone on to successful careers in fields such as marketing, community outreach, and media relations, to name only a few. If you are more specifically interested in journalism or technical writing, consider applying for PSU’s [MA/MS in Technical Writing](#).

“I want to teach at a community college.”

An MA in English qualifies you to teach lower-division (freshman and sophomore) courses in either two- or four-year colleges. The English MA at PSU will provide you with excellent training for a career in college teaching. In addition to offering a range of courses on literature, film, and other creative media, we have a strong curriculum of rhetoric and composition courses, including [English 513: Teaching and Tutoring Writing](#). We can also provide you with [opportunities to teach and tutor](#) through our GA, WIC, EA, and University Studies Mentor programs, as well as through teaching practicums with faculty. Most jobs teaching lower-division courses mainly involve composition instruction, with some opportunities to teach literature and other subjects. So the combined training we provide in writing and literature pedagogy will give you an edge when you start searching for jobs.

Be aware that a large percentage of lower-division teaching jobs are part-time, adjunct positions. While it is possible to find permanent and tenure-track employment as a community college professor, to do so will take patience and flexibility. Portland, like many other popular metropolitan areas, has an especially tight market for full- and even part-time positions for college instructors. Consider whether you are willing to move to a different area or supplement your teaching income with another kind of work. For more information on the market for college English teaching, check out the Academic Workforce Advocacy Kit on the [Modern Language Association website](#). To get a sense of the Oregon job market, you can also explore the website for the [Oregon Labor Market Information System](#) and

contact community colleges in your area to find out more about employment opportunities and requirements.

“I want to go on for a PhD.”

Many of our students have gone on to excellent PhD programs. In the last four years, for example, our graduates have entered doctoral programs at the University of Wisconsin, the University of Michigan, Northwestern, UMass-Amherst, and the University of Texas at Austin, as well as other similar programs. By enrolling at PSU, you will be able to narrow down your interests, develop your analytical and writing skills, increase your command of the field, and obtain application materials such as faculty recommendations and writing samples that will help gain you entry into a PhD program and succeed once you are there.

Prospective MA students should know that most PhD programs in English limit the number of graduate credits they will count toward their degrees. In other words, many schools require that you do most of your coursework with them, and so the work you did for your MA may not significantly reduce the amount of time or money you will need to spend earning a PhD. There are exceptions to this rule. For example, the University of Oregon English PhD program will allow you to transfer up to 9 courses from another institution. But if you are certain that you want to earn a PhD you may consider applying directly to programs now rather than beginning with an MA. If you do so, be aware that doctoral programs are becoming more and more competitive and you should apply to more than just your top choices of schools if you want to increase your chances of admission. Alternatively, if you believe you need more experience before you will be ready to embark on doctoral work, PSU’s MA program is a great place to begin. Our faculty have been trained in some of the country’s finest doctoral programs and we are well-qualified to give you the instruction and support you will need to follow in our footsteps.

We do advise anyone considering doctoral study to learn more about job prospects after graduation. Unfortunately, the job market for English PhDs has been in crisis for over a decade, with few signs that the situation will improve anytime soon. You can obtain more information through the [Modern Language Association website](#), which features an Academic Workforce Advocacy Kit as well as reports on PhD job placement for the last several years. Other sources of information include the [Chronicle of Higher Education](#), the [ADE Bulletin](#), [Academe](#), and several recent books on the academic profession. There is some evidence that certain specialties within the field of English are more sought-after than others, so seek advice from the above sources as well as professors in the fields that interest you. Also, flexibility about where you would be willing to live is always an asset when seeking academic employment.

“I want to satisfy my intellectual curiosity and build confidence in myself, my skills, and my ideas.”

The PSU MA program in English is a wonderful place for you to explore your ideas, interests, and dreams. If the above information has convinced you that an English MA is right for you, then we look forward to welcoming you to our program!