Preparing You for a Future of Meaningful Work

This tool is intended to assist you in effectively managing your career exploration, planning, and decision making. In order to prepare for success after graduation, it is essential to take initiative, be intentional, and have goals in mind. Through exploration and “testing out” ideas of interest, your plan may shift or change—that’s completely natural! Stay flexible, and take advantage of the rich resources and support persons who are ready to walk alongside you on your path to purposeful work.

Department of ENGLISH

Your Career & Professional Development Plan

Assess

Assess, articulate and develop your strengths, interests and values. Begin to explore options that are compatible with your strengths and interests.

Explore

Gather information on career paths of interest. Intentionally involve yourself in opportunities where you can apply and further develop your skill sets, grow your qualifications, and explore areas of interest.

Experience

Enhance critical professional competencies in order to successfully connect your professional goals with real world opportunities. Take your experience to the next level by participating in meaningful opportunities that will differentiate you from the rest.

Transition

Synthesize your collective experiences from your academics and out-of-class involvement. Begin to articulate a plan and take action to translate your skills and experiences into meaningful post-graduate opportunities.
Reflections from English Alumni...

In my work for a non-profit agency, I write newsletters, create print advertisements, update website content, and help maintain communication between our office and clients, donors, and community members. Through my English training at Messiah College, I learned the practical aspects of writing through courses like Magazine Writing, but I also learned the power of language as an art form through literature and creative writing courses. All of this taught me to communicate concisely and effectively not only through an essay or poem, but through any use of language from taglines and flyers to grant proposals and sixteen-page annual reports. To major in English is to major in the power of words.

- Brittany (Lodge) Mountz ’09
Project Assistant and Grant Writer,
Adult Care of Chester County, Exton, PA

The English degree I received at Messiah College was perfect preparation for everything that I have done so far in my life: having a good handle on written communication was valuable in my first job out of school as a store support representative for a major franchise; a highly developed sense of problem-solving and analytical skills were needed when I started a business in England; and the writing disciplines I learned have more recently combined with my passion for the written word as I moved over into full-time freelance writing.

- Shawn Smucker ’99
Freelance Writer
Paradise, PA

So much of being a good theologian and interpreter of the Bible is being a good reader. All the concepts of literary theory and literary criticism transfer to my studies at seminary. There is some new terminology as ideas get translated across disciplines, but the concepts have been the same. It has been a good feeling to realize so many of these key interpretative tools are ones already in my scholarly toolbox. Plus, studying at Messiah College with its emphasis on Christian engagement with broader culture has helped to combat the narrow vision that plagues a number of my peers at seminary who have spent all their lives in insular Christian communities and institutions.

- Matthew Hahn ’06
Working on a Masters of Divinity
Gordon-Conwell Seminary

Whenever I think of what I took away from my time at Messiah, I think first about how the English major taught me to think critically. Regardless of whether we were looking at student writing or classic literature, my classmates and I were encouraged to read texts closely, to interpret carefully, and to communicate our thoughts in class and in writing as clearly as possible. Those skills have served me well in my career -- particularly in my current position working for the human rights organization International Justice Mission. Every day, I’m writing grant proposals and reports that need to clearly capture the desperate needs of vulnerable populations in the world in a way that encourages our supporters to continue partnering with us through prayer and financial support.

- Emily Rainville ’04
Reporting and Research Coordinator, Donor Relations
International Justice Mission, Washington DC
Assess

Who am I & where am I going?

Gain insight into your unique strengths, interests and skills, particularly as they relate to career paths in English. Identify resources from the list below to begin building this important foundation to decision making.

What resources are available?

- **Self-assessment inventories** are available through the Career Center to help you begin narrowing down your interests, strengths, and values.

- If you’re unsure if your major is a good fit for your strengths, consult the Choosing a Major guide.

- Attend the Career Center’s fall Open House to learn about services and opportunities. You’re encouraged to schedule a “getting started” appointment with a career coach sometime during your first year on campus.

How can I learn about my options?

- Visit the Career Planning for English Majors section on the Career Center’s website.

- Get to know the Occupational Outlook Handbook and O*NET for specific information on career options.

How can I be proactive?

- Visit the Career Center early, check out their website and start constructing a customized career and professional development plan with the help of a career coach.

- Create a first draft of your resume: what gaps do you need to fill? Use this as a guide to start constructing an action plan that includes relevant, sought-after experience by employers and graduate schools.

Reflection Q’s

- How would I describe my skills, interests, and values?

- Considering past and present experiences, what energizes me most? Be specific!

- How are these aspects of myself shaping my decisions about a major and potential career path?

- What options for involvement outside the classroom might allow me to gain experience while further developing my transferable skill sets?

- Begin building relationships with your advisor and professors within the English Department. Take advantage of office hours and department activities.

- Read the English Department’s monthly newsletter for opportunities both on and off campus.

- Attend readings of published authors on campus and ask them about their career paths.

- Become familiar with the resources available through the English Department’s website.

- Learn about the value of a liberal arts education as it relates to the workplace by checking out information on “transferable skills” you are learning. These skills are very marketable to employers and graduate schools, so be intentional about developing them.
**Explore**

*Take your ideas out for a test drive.*

Gather information on career paths of interest and opportunities for gaining relevant experience. Intentionally choose activities that will allow you to explore and grow personally and professionally.

**Where and how can I gather more info?**

- Meet with a [career coach](#) to discuss where you’re at and any adjustments that should be made to your customized career and professional development plan. Brainstorm ideas for complementing your classroom learning with relevant experience to start filling the gaps in your [resume](#).

- Learn more about career paths that relate to your interests in the following ways:
  - *Job shadow* a Messiah alum or personal contact to get an insider’s view into a career.
  - Conduct at least three [informational interviews](#) with professionals in your field of interest.
  - Attend the Career Center’s [Pizza with Professionals](#) events and other workshops.
  - Attend the annual [Career & Graduate School Expo](#) to gather information and talk with recruiters.
  - Invest time in [building relationships](#) with educators on campus with whom you share specific interests/passions. Consider seeking a mentor with whom to discuss your vocational path.

- Become familiar with [FalconJobs](#), a centralized database of part-time and full-time employment opportunities. Log-in with your Messiah email and ID number (without the zeros in front!).

**How should I get involved?**

- Explore options for [involvement](#) outside of the classroom through offices such as [Student Involvement & Leadership Programs](#), the [Agapé Center for Service & Learning](#), [Study Abroad](#), [College Ministries](#), [Residence Life](#), [Multicultural Programs](#) and much more. Consider choosing at least one area to get involved.

**Reflection Q’s**

- What experiences might be valued to a prospective employer or grad school?
- How can I apply what I’m learning in the classroom through meaningful experience?
- Am I focusing on quality rather than quantity?

- Strategically choose [activities](#) on campus that will allow you to gain experience and further develop your transferable skills. Examples of opportunities include: applying for a position with [The Writing Center](#), writing for [The Swinging Bridge](#), [The Minnemingo Review](#), or [The Collaboratory’s newsletter](#). Employers and grad schools value quality over quantity, so choose meaningful opportunities.

- Consider doing an internship through Messiah’s [Internship Program](#). Data shows that employers highly value relevant experience, regardless of major!

- Establish a profile on [LinkedIn](#). See what Messiah [alumni are doing](#) by joining the [Messiah College Professional Network](#).

- Begin thinking of how you will spend your summer. What experiences, paid and/or volunteer, will help you build on your experience and continue to develop marketable skill sets in your field of interest?

- Practice [articulating](#) the transferable skills you are developing — this will be important when articulating your qualifications to future employers or graduate schools.

**Reflection Q’s**

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- How can I apply what I’m learning in the classroom through meaningful experience?
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Experience

How can I differentiate myself?

It’s time to take your experience to the next level! Increase your marketability and uniqueness through acquiring real world, relevant experience. This is also the time to develop and enhance your professional “brand.” In other words, what do YOU have to offer to a prospective employer or graduate school? If you’re not thinking of pursuing a career in a field traditionally related to your major, research the field(s) you’re considering. Think about how your academic background will prepare you for making unique contributions to your field of interest.

What constitutes “relevant experience?”

- Employers and graduate schools are looking for candidates with relevant experience, yet every professional field is unique. Do research and talk with professionals who share your interests to know what type of experience is valued in your targeted field.
- Determine and take action toward gaining experiences that will help you grow personally and professionally, such as an internship, leadership position on campus, research, studying abroad, or service learning.
- If you haven’t already, consider opportunities such as writing for The Minnemingo Review or The Swinging Bridge, or applying for a position with The Writing Center.
- If you’re considering a career in writing or editing, seek opportunities to have your work published.
- Try to get some of your more substantial, “A” quality papers published in National Journals - Oswald Review or Sigma Tau Delta journals (www.english.org).

What professional competencies are important?

- Think creatively about how your experiences, major, and the skills you’re demonstrating might be transferable to your targeted field.

- Practice communicating your professional image through social media, in writing (resume) and verbally (mock interview) with a career coach.
- Utilize drop-in hours or schedule an appointment to receive personalized feedback.
- This is so important: expand your network and connections with professionals in your field, Messiah alumni and at other campus and Career Center events. Continue doing informational interviews!

What tools and resources will help me get connected professionally?

- Attend job and graduate school fairs throughout the year. Start early; remember, you don’t have to be in the job-seeking phase to attend!
- Connect with professional associations and conferences in your field, such as Sigma Tau Delta. Ask your faculty members for referrals.
- Develop “networking cards” with basic contact info and a summary of your goals and qualifications. Have these available as you meet new contacts who may serve as critical resources in the future.
- Start building your professional wardrobe!
- Stay on top of current events, trends, and hot topics in your field through journals, magazines, and the news.
- If you’re considering graduate school, read through the Grad School Planning Guide. Also, attend events such as the Personal Statement Workshop, Practice Admissions Exams, and Graduate School Luncheon.

Reflection Q’s

- What specific experiences are highly desirable in my targeted field?
- Have I “tested out” my area of interest to know it’s a good fit?
- Can I articulate the skills through specific examples that will be marketable to my target?
- What type of leadership position might I consider?
Transition

The next move is yours!

Transitioning to post-graduate life, whether that is graduate school, employment, a gap year, or full-time service, includes many decisions. Keep in mind that career development is a lifetime process. That said, consider it your “first destination.” As a steward of your strengths, consider carefully what you have to contribute to your next step towards a future in English.

What are my transition goals?

- Research and clarify your top occupational or graduate school choices which are congruent with your skills and interests.
- Discuss your goals and ideas with and receive feedback from your faculty, mentors and the Career Center (stop by to schedule an appointment).
- Work with a career coach to devise a job search or graduate school application strategy. Stay on track by developing a timeline.
- Gather information on realistic salary expectations.
- Stay active in the process by engaging your network of personal and professional contacts. Communicate your goals and ideas about what might be next for you. Reach out to additional contacts through the Messiah College Professional Network.

What do I have to offer?

- Reflect on the totality of your experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. What knowledge, skills, and abilities do you have to offer a prospective employer or graduate school? In what practical ways have you demonstrated these strengths? This is essential preparation for resume writing and interviewing.
- Refine and tailor your application or admissions materials, including your resume, cover letter, essays, LinkedIn profile, and interview responses to include specific examples and accomplishments from your experience.
- Secure employment or graduate school references from those who can speak to your proven strengths and potential. Don’t ask for recommendations at the last minute! Plan ahead and give adequate time (approx. 3 weeks).

Where can I find opportunities?

- Use an eclectic mix of resources in your job/grad school search strategy. Review the Job Search and Graduate School Guides.
- View job opportunities posted to Messiah students and alumni through FalconJobs.
- Consider the Professional Writing Program at Carnegie Mellon University, which has recognized the quality of Messiah English majors.
- Networking! Invest in relationship-building and connecting with professionals in your field of interest. The Messiah College Professional Network is a great place to start.
- Attend job and graduate school fairs on campus and in your geographic area of interest. Review a tip sheet!
- Consult career and graduate school resources on the Career Center website noted above.
- Connect with job boards through professional association websites.
- Social media: Follow employers of interest on Twitter; engage in discussions within professional groups on LinkedIn.
- Remember to follow up, say “thank you,” and track progress.

Reflection Q’s

- What are my top strengths I have to offer an employer or graduate school?
- Does my resume accurately convey my transferable skills and experiences?
- How have I demonstrated the skills that will be marketable to my target audience?