

Preparing for a Career in Teaching English at the Secondary (High-School) Level

1) The first decision you'll need to make is whether you want to teach in a *private or a public* school. *Public schools* demand certification from the state government and thus require that you go through a teacher-training program culminating in student teaching, where you will be in charge of a classroom under the supervision of an experienced educator. *Private schools* consist of independent schools, meaning those not reliant on government funding, and religious academies. Such institutions do not require state certification but tend to pay less than public schools; in addition, they rarely offer tenure. John Jay College itself is a public institution and as its English Department we encourage our majors to give back to the education system by teaching in NYC's public schools.

2) If you want to teach in a **public school**, you'll need to decide on the state where you want to teach since the state certifies educators. Next, find and apply to teacher certification programs in your chosen state: four such programs at CUNY will be highlighted below. As of 2015, certified teachers in the state of New York will need to pass *four examinations*. Students usually take these exams once they have been accepted to a teacher education program, but check the individual program for its requirements. See the website of the New York State Teacher examinations for details about these exams: <http://www.nystce.nesinc.com>

The two exams that most concern us here are the *Academic Literacy Skills Test (ALST)* and the *Revised Content Specialty Test (CST)* in the area of your certificate, which in this case is English. The Graduate Record Exam (GRE) in English literature is NOT required to become a teacher in the public schools. This exam is used only to gain admission to an MA/PhD program in English literature.

The ALST focuses on the general knowledge and skills you should gain as an undergraduate. Choosing your general education classes well will help you pass this test: ask yourself "Will I gain a solid liberal arts education by taking this class?" when fulfilling such requirements. These exams require close reading and analytical writing, so you should also take Writing-Intensive classes when available. Consider enrolling in English 260, "Grammar, Syntax, and Style." If you have earned at least a "B+" in English 101 and English 201, and you have strong social skills, ask your professor to nominate you for English 255, "Argument Writing." This class could lead to the opportunity to become a writing tutor at the Writing Center.

THE RCST in English will test the knowledge of literature in English. To do well on this exam, you'll need a Shakespeare class, Lit 313 (Shakespeare) or Lit 314 (Shakespeare and Justice). You'll also need a strong foundation in American literature. To this end, you might take classes such as Lit 233 (American Stories), Lit 223 (African-American Literature) and Lit 326 (Crime, Justice, and Punishment in US Literature). Make sure to take Lit 371, "Topics in Medieval Literature," since this field of study is difficult to learn on your own; this exam usually assumes familiarity with Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. You should also take a course covering the works of John Milton.

Expect your interviewers to ask you to coach a sport or supervise an activity, such as the yearbook or the newspaper. In some cases, they will want teachers to coach a sport for each season.

3) If you want to teach in a **private school**, you'll need to have high grades in your area of expertise: A-grades in the humanities and B-grades in math and science. Hiring committees for these institutions tend to be more concerned with your mastery of a field than your experience in the classroom, though any such background will prove to your advantage. They also might look for faculty who can teach in more than one subject: English or language arts teachers are often asked to teach social studies as well or to participate in "core" courses that combine English and history. For this reason, students interested in a career in teaching English should consider a double major or a minor in such subjects as History or Humanities and Justice Studies. Another common combination is English and a foreign language, so if you want to go this route, consider finding some way of demonstrating your proficiency (perhaps a minor?) in a second language. Like those for public schools, interviewers for private schools will expect candidates to participate in after-school programs.

The best way to find a private school job is to go directly to the websites of the schools where you want to teach and to click on the job ads. If you are flexible as far as your location, subscribe to portals such as the National Association of Independent Schools <http://careers.nais.org/jobseekers/> or The Council for American Private Education, which includes religious as well as independent schools: <http://www.capenet.org/teach.html> Checking the employment website <http://www.monster.com> is also always an option. After two-three years of teaching experience in this country, you may apply for jobs in international (American) schools, but most overseas institutions don't consider applicants before that time.

4) *Programs Leading to Teacher Certification.* The following four programs are offered on CUNY campuses. There are of course other teacher training programs at private universities as well as at institutions such as SUNY.

--Hunter College's School of Education. Apply to the program in Adolescent English Education. You will need a 3.0 undergraduate GPA and 30 credits in your major. This program is the most competitive at CUNY.

<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/school-of-education/current-students/teacher-certification>

--Brooklyn College's Graduate Department of Education, Secondary Education. Check the requirements for admission to the program to become an English teacher (grades 7-12):

<http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/programs/displayAdmissionsRequirementsReport.cfm>

--City College's English Education Program. You will need a minimum 3.0 GPA, and you will have to have taken the ALST before applying to this Master's program:

<http://www.cuny.edu/english/index.cfm>

--Lehman's College's Department of Middle and High School Education (MHSE). Click on the links for English Education. This program offers certification in the course of gaining a M.S. Ed. in English Education. You will likely apply for sequence three, as someone who has a major in English but no prior classwork in education.

<http://www.lehman.edu/academics/education/graduate-mhse/index.php>

---The College of Staten Island's Department of Education offers sequences for people who want to become secondary education teachers in English, math, biology or social studies but who have not completed the course work for the initial certification. It offers similar sequences in childhood education for those who want to become elementary teachers but have not yet finished the course work. Other sequences include special education at the elementary or the secondary level as well as TESOL (the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language).

<http://www.csi.cuny.edu/schoolofeducation/programs>

--Queens College offers a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) in Adolescent English. Students in this program are expected to achieve certification in the course of working toward this degree. Their program is targeted at people who want to become language arts educators in a specifically urban context. Note that the application process requires the General Test of the Graduate Record Exam.

<http://www.qc.cuny.edu/admissions/graduate/degree/Pages/degreedetail.aspx?DegreeID=22>

5) *The Masters Degree*

Many programs will require you to enroll in a Master's program on the path to gain your certification. The smartest approach is to secure your certificate and to apply for your first teaching job *before* completing the Master's because doing so prevents you appearing over-qualified (and therefore more expensive to pay) while still having little classroom experience; you can usually finish the graduate degree as part of your district's continuing education requirements once you are in the classroom.

6) If you're serious about a career in teaching then get professionally informed and join NCTE (the National Council of Teachers of English) <http://www.ncte.org> Membership costs \$25.00/year for students and another \$10.00/year for *English Journal*. Read the articles because they will show you what really happens professionally today in ELA (English Language Arts).

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