

## Studying for English

### The Idea

English classes consist of reading, vocabulary, and writing components. Each of these components present their own challenges for successfully learning the material. Part of the problem with the components of English classes is that students often view reading, writing, and vocabulary as three separate entities with little to no overlap.

However, to be successful in English classes, students must see the interconnectedness of the three components. Reading, writing, and vocabulary are all required to become successful at critical thinking, analytic reasoning, and argumentation. A general strategy to improve your reading comprehension, writing effectiveness, and vocabulary is to read a little every day. Reading sophisticated pieces of literature requires you to think through what you're reading, exposes you to unfamiliar vocabulary, and demonstrates for you examples of effective writing styles.

Below are more specific strategies to target each component of an English class, but remember: reading, writing, and vocabulary make more sense when used together in context.

### Reading

Reading a piece of literature can be overwhelming; many students don't know where to start, or where to go with the information in a text. Here is a process to make reading less intimidating and more understandable.

1. Just Read. - Read through the literary piece once just for pleasure, don't worry about anything else. While reading just jot down some of your reactions in the margins
2. Read and Find. - Read through the piece again, but this time, break the literature into chunks (four sentences to a couple paragraphs). Focus closely on that chunk, picking out any literary elements, writing down your reactions and predictions for what's to follow.
3. Talk About It. - Talk with another classmate, your family, your dog ... anyone! ... because hearing yourself talk about the story helps with comprehension. Additionally, you can clarify things that you don't understand and get a different perspective from someone else.

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### Vocabulary

Learning vocabulary words can sometimes seem like disconnected busywork in any class. However, advanced vocabulary is necessary to comprehend, discuss, and excel in any field. Here are two strategies for learning vocabulary words.

1. Flash Cards - On the front of an index card write the vocabulary word; write the definition AND a sentence on the back of the card. It is important to study your flash cards a little every day (don't wait until Thursday night or Friday morning!). Try saying them out loud or going through them with a friend.
2. Write Sentences - Create short stories or sentences with your vocabulary words so that you can understand the word in context. For words with several definitions, write a sentence for each definition.

It is important to remember that vocabulary is not an unrelated exercise, but a source for integration and improving your writing and comprehension. Find ways to assimilate the vocabulary into your language so that you can practice and familiarize yourself with these words.

### Writing

Writing is a critical part of any English course and most courses in college, thus it is critical that students learn how to write effectively. Effective writing encompasses the ideals of clarity and brevity, meaning that one's writing eliminates "fluff" by getting to the point and clearly explains / supports research. Effective, formal writing also depends on correct grammar and the use of sophisticated language.

Here are some words to avoid when writing formally.

- I / you words - I, me, we, you, your, my, mine, our
- Things - something, nothing, anything, and all other things
- Being Verbs - am, is, are, was, were, has, have, had, be, being, been
- a lot
- very, much
- any form of the verb "to show," especially "this shows that"

Below is a format to help students organize their thoughts and compose essays.

# 5 Paragraph Essay Format

## INTRODUCTION

- Hook to grab readers attention
- Necessary Background Information on topic
  - Thesis and three Main Points



## SUPPORTING PARAGRAPH #1

- Topic Sentence about Main point #1
  - Supporting details



## SUPPORTING PARAGRAPH #2

- Topic Sentence about Main point #2
  - Supporting details



## SUPPORTING PARAGRAPH #3

- Topic Sentence about Main point #3
  - Supporting details



## CONCLUSION

- Summary
- Restate Thesis and Main points
- Closing remarks and/or resolution