

Dear Mom and Dad,

I know you want me to make the most of my Harvard education. I also know how much you've worked and sacrificed to make these four years possible. We've talked before about the importance of finding a concentration that will lead to a good career. But I've come to a conclusion that may surprise you: after thinking it through from every angle I've decided to concentrate in English. I'm convinced it's the right choice, and I'm very excited about it!

At this point I know what you're thinking: "Of all the possible fields, why choose one with no application in the real world? Especially after all the money we've poured into your education!" Let me explain. First of all, I looked around and discovered that graduates of Harvard's English program regularly move into rewarding careers in law, advertising, marketing, consulting, finance, real estate, journalism, and many others. The record is impressive. You can see for yourself at an English department web page, "Alumni Spotlight." Or you can read how the treasurer of Harvard University attributes much of his success in business to the skills he learned as an English concentrator. Studying English will prepare me for any field that values careful reading, precise thinking, and the ability to write clear, persuasive prose.

Practical reasons like these are reassuring, but they didn't tip the balance for me. The fact is I find nothing more stimulating than reading great works of literature and discussing them with my classmates and teachers; nothing more rewarding than plunging into a poem by Keats and struggling to turn my interpretation of it into a well-crafted essay. I love losing myself in a novel, but I also love that moment of discovering how the text has profound things to say about culture. During my years at Harvard I want to keep company with literary giants like Woolf and Whitman and Dickinson and Chaucer. I will never tire of the richness of Shakespeare's imagination and language. If I can take the measure of Milton and Joyce—and relish every minute of it—then no challenge in the real world can intimidate me. After all, what I'm talking about is what we both want from my college years: an intellectually demanding course of study that will prepare me for whatever life has to offer. I can think of no path to that destination that will make me as happy as my concentration in English.

yours etc.,