

PAPERS: GENERAL CRITERIA (PGC)

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CHAPTER I. TITLES

1. The title of your essay should both name the text or texts you are writing about, as well as give some indication as to what the argument will be. In other words, I should know, reading the title, both what text(s) you will be writing about and at least what the basic topic of your essay will be.

CHAPTER II. THE BASICS: FORMAT, PROOFREADING, PLAGIARISM AND AUDIENCE

1. **The papers you write for this class should be computer-printed, double-spaced, titled, paginated, stapled and proofread carefully.** Fonts should be set at 12-point in Times New Roman. Papers are due on the designated date; printer problems and other technical difficulties are not acceptable excuses for failure to hand in a paper on time. To avoid such common problems, you should print out and proofread the final draft of your paper well before the time the paper is due. Absence and/or excuses on the day a paper is due are not acceptable.
2. It is especially important that you proofread your work *after you have printed out a final draft*. If errors appear on this draft, correct them and reprint the paper.
3. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Plagiarism consists of representing the words and/or ideas of another as your own. If you use someone else's ideas, be sure to cite your sources carefully and distinguish his or her thoughts from your own. If you use someone else's words, be sure to place them in quotation marks and cite your sources.
4. Your audience for all writing should be an educated English major at the undergraduate or graduate level (depending on your own status) who is not immediately familiar with the texts under discussion, but who knows the basic literary history and terminology that any good English major would know. Do not assume, therefore, that your reader has any ideas about a particular philosophical school, a particular philosophical concept, a particular literary-theoretical concept, et c. The reader is not in your head. You need to explain what it is you discuss that is not knowledge familiar to the average English major. Think about it this way. Say you are giving your essay to a peer from another class who is also an English major, but who may not have read the text(s) you are discussing. What would that peer know? What would that peer not know?

¹ This document is adapted from a document created by Professors Jeannine DeLombard and Dan White of the University of Toronto Mississauga: <https://sites.utm.utoronto.ca/danwhite/content/welcome>.

CHAPTER III. THE INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH OR PARAGRAPHS: TOPIC AND THESIS

1. *Generalities in Opening Sentences.* In your first paragraph, **avoid all sweeping generalities, about human beings, about poetry, about civilization, about anything “through the ages,”** etc. If you follow the steps below, this should not be a problem. **Again: do not start essays with generalities about human nature or literature.**
2. *Placement of Thesis.* In shorter essays (approximately four to six pages), your thesis should be positioned at the end of **one relatively long introductory paragraph (nearly to the end of the page or slightly more)**. In longer essays (approximately seven or more pages), however, it may be better for you to have not one, but two (or possibly even three) introductory paragraphs, with your thesis delayed until the end of the second (or third) paragraph. Use common sense here. If essential background information is necessary, if essential concepts or terms must be defined, and so on, before we get to your thesis – without which your thesis would have little or no meaning – then you need to spend more than a single paragraph preparing the reader to understand the foundation of your argument. But again, in an essay of up to six or so pages, it should come in the first paragraph. Consult me if you have questions on this point.
3. *Topic versus Thesis.* Your introductory paragraph or paragraphs should do two things: introduce your reader to your topic and present your thesis. It is important to distinguish in your mind between your topic – what you will write about – and your thesis – what you will argue or attempt to prove. **A thesis may be defined as an interpretation that you set forth in specific terms and propose to defend or demonstrate by reasoned argumentation and literary analysis.** Your thesis, then, is the position that you **are attempting to persuade your reader to accept.**
4. *Length of Thesis.* Your thesis may be more than one sentence long. If you have a good thesis, however, in most cases you will be able to articulate it in one sentence. If you require two, that’s fine, so long as you make sure that the argument is coherent and that the transition from the first to the second sentence is clear and effective.
5. *The Thesis as Provisional.* Please carefully consider this important hint: You do not need a refined thesis in order to start writing. If you begin with a *provisional thesis* and then do good and careful close readings, you will often find a version of your final thesis in the last paragraph of a first draft. Integrate that version into your first paragraph and revise from there. Do not worry too much about your thesis, therefore, until after you’ve written out your close readings! A good final thesis should **emerge from**, not precede, your analyses.
6. *Statements of Fact versus Theses.* A thesis cannot be a *statement of fact*. Ask yourself, “Could anyone even potentially disagree with my argument?” “Would a mere summary or description of the text(s) I’m discussing suffice to support my claim?” If no one could possibly disagree, or if a simple summary would show that what you’ve said is true, then you have most likely set forth a statement of fact. And there’s no need to spend several pages proving a fact!
7. *The Thesis as Representative of the Whole.* Your thesis statement should be specific, and should give the reader some sense of what the *structure* of your paper will be. If your thesis contains two

or three parts, then your reader will expect you to discuss those two or three parts in the order in which you've given them in your thesis statement.

8. *Steps toward a Thesis.* Now that you've read and considered these guidelines, here are a few more concrete steps that you can take to help form a *provisional thesis*. Note that I do not say "easy steps." All of these steps require work.
 - a. Keeping the assignment sheet in mind, look over these notes and then select the one specific thing that grabs you the most, the one particular image or metaphor, or limited set of images or metaphors, about which you feel in your gut that you have the most to say.
 - a. Next, using your notes, make a list of every instance of that image or metaphor, and then from that list choose the two or three passages **that call out most loudly for interpretation**.
 - b. Following my suggestions on close reading below, write out your interpretations of the instances that you've chosen, dedicating one rough paragraph to each. Remember, your goal here is to say not just *what* you think your passages mean, but rather to show *how* they mean what you think they mean. What *work* do they perform, and *how* do they perform it?
 - c. Finally, look at what you've written and let your provisional thesis emerge out of your interpretations, out of your ideas concerning the work that your image or metaphor, or set of images or metaphors, performs in your text(s).

When you're done with these steps, you should also have the foundations for several of your body paragraphs. With these foundations, you'll be more than ready to turn to the next phase of composition, argumentation, the process by which you'll persuade your reader that your thesis is valid and worth accepting.

CHAPTER IV. ARGUMENTATION (I): BODY PARAGRAPHS, TOPIC SENTENCES AND TRANSITIONS

1. *The Essay as Logical Progression.* Your argument must proceed in a *logical progression* from one thought to the next. This logic should be clear at the level of the sentence, the paragraph and the paper: within the sentence, from one phrase to the next, within the paragraph, from one sentence to the next, and within the paper, from one paragraph to the next.
2. *Each Paragraph as Cohesive.* Each paragraph should develop one coherent point that relates clearly back to the thesis within the logical progression of your essay, and everything in the paragraph should be relevant to that one coherent point.
3. *The Topic Sentence as "Mini-Thesis."* During revision, then, concentrate first on rewriting the topic sentence of each paragraph. I find the term "topic sentence" somewhat misleading, because this sentence must give more than merely the topic of the paragraph; rather, it should communicate the point that you need to make within the logical progression of your paper. Just as the introduction must give both the topic and the thesis of the paper, the topic sentence must give both the topic and the point of the paragraph. In other words, the topic sentence

should be a “mini-thesis.” Everything your thesis does with respect to your paper, your topic sentence should do with respect to your paragraph.

4. *The Topic Sentence Not a Statement of Fact.* The most important guideline, therefore, that I can offer concerning topic sentences is the same as the first guideline I have proposed regarding your thesis: like a thesis, a topic sentence cannot be a statement of fact. Rather, it must present the point or idea that your paragraph needs to make within the logical progression of your argument. Make sure you understand the difference between a fact and a point: a point needs to be demonstrated; a fact does not. (Often, if your first attempt at a topic sentence merely conveys a fact, you can figure out what your point is by asking yourself, “What is *important* for my argument *about* that fact?”)
5. *Topic Sentences as Transitions.* In addition to presenting the point or idea of the paragraph, your topic sentence should provide a clear and specific *transition* from the preceding to the present paragraph. As in an outline, paragraph A must lead clearly and logically into paragraph B, paragraph B into paragraph C and so on. In order to clarify your logical progression from one paragraph to the next, therefore, every topic sentence should contain a transition that explicitly connects the point of the preceding paragraph to the point of the present paragraph.

In order to craft effective transitions, try the following: write out the point of the preceding paragraph and then write out the point of the present paragraph; now write out the *connection* between the two. That connection is your transition!

6. *Checklist on Topic Sentences.* As you revise, then, check every topic sentence against the following guidelines:
 - a. The topic sentence cannot be a statement of fact; rather, it must present a point or idea within the logical progression of your argument.
 - b. The topic sentence must clearly and explicitly relate to your thesis, the larger argument of your paper. If it is unclear how a topic sentence relates to your thesis, either the topic sentence, the paragraph, or the thesis itself, needs to be revised!
 - c. The topic sentence must provide a clear and explicit transition from the point of the preceding paragraph to the point of the present paragraph.

CHAPTER V. ARGUMENTATION (II): ANALYSIS THROUGH CLOSE READING

1. *Close Reading.* Your main goal in every English paper is to analyze your text(s). In other words, your aim is to discover, refine and support your own interpretations – not summaries or translations! – through a technique that we call “close reading.” Please remember, then, that the heart of every paper you write for this course should consist of **careful, detailed and nuanced close reading** of the nitty-gritty of the text itself.
2. *Summary versus Analysis.* In order to become a good writer of literary criticism, you will have to make the important distinction between summary, on the one hand, and analysis or

interpretation, on the other. When you summarize, you repeat what the text actually says, in so many words; when you analyze, you explain to your audience, in some detail, certain points that even an astute reader would not necessarily reach on his or her own; you produce your own ideas about how the text creates meaning. In order to produce these ideas, you will need to perform close reading, to look closely at the language of the text in order to demonstrate not just what you think the text means, but, more importantly, **how it means what you think it does**. See the difference? It's an important one.

3. *Draw from the Text*. How, then, do you go about interpreting and analyzing rather than merely summarizing a text? Quote the text and perform close readings of every passage you quote: discuss in concrete and specific terms the words, metaphors, images, and/or tone of the passage you are analyzing. What work do particular words or metaphors in the passage you've just quoted perform, and how do they perform that work? And remember, the purpose of your close reading in each paragraph is to support the point of that paragraph, which should be clearly articulated in the topic sentence.
4. *Summary of Close Reading Objectives*. In carrying out your close readings, then, your goal is always to do *two things*:
 - a. to demonstrate to your audience *how you read* the passage that you have quoted; in other words, *by paying close attention to the language of the text*, to explain *how* the passage means what you say it means; and
 - b. to show how your reading *supports the larger point of the paragraph*.

As you reread your paper during revision, when you come to *each quotation*, ask yourself: "Do I interpret the language of my quotations in detailed and specific terms?" "Is it clear how my close readings support the topic sentence of the paragraph, and thus the thesis of the paper?"

5. *Analyze Literature in the Present Tense*. Because you are interpreting a given piece of literature in the present rather than summarizing what "happened" in it, you should always stick to the present tense when interpreting. Literature, indeed, although written in the past, is still happening as you read and discuss it, right? Historical background and biographical information should be discussed in the past tense, but when writing about the literary text itself, stick to the present, which will almost force you to interpret rather than summarize.
6. *Proportional Analysis*. Always make sure that you do justice to whatever it is you quote! Your own critical analysis should be at least twice as long as whatever it is you quote; do not assume that the reader knows how you feel about a passage that you take the time to quote.
7. *Speakers and authors*. Note that the lyric speaker of a poem – the "I" – is not identical with the author of the poem, as though the experiences articulated in the poem are biographical representations of events in the author's life precisely as these events happened. Refer to the speaking "I" of a poem as a *speaker*; the term *narrator* refers to speakers of prose.

CHAPTER VI. THE CONCLUSION

1. Literary critics often conclude their studies by considering how their reading of a text enriches or complicates our understanding of a larger literary, social, historical or cultural movement (the Enlightenment, neoclassicism, sensibility, Romanticism) or our appreciation of the status of a significant issue (reason, gender, emotion, class, death, sexuality) in a particular cultural context. As you conclude an English paper, you may find it helpful to reflect on how your reading of a given text or texts pertains to some of the larger issues you have addressed in either our class or related ones. You may want to gesture to some of these connections briefly in your conclusion. This will make your paper feel less like an exercise and more like an important contribution to literary studies.

CHAPTER VII. CITING AND DOCUMENTATION IN MLA FORMAT: OVERVIEW

1. **You are responsible for learning how to cite and document poetry and prose in your essay, according to the latest edition of the Formatting and Style Guide published by the Modern Language Association (MLA), or the edition specified in class.** You will want to visit the following website:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_style_introduction.html.

Go to the above address, scroll down until you see the “MLA Formatting and Style Guide” drop-down menu, and click it. You will see a list that looks like this:

- MLA Formatting and Style Guide ▾
- General Format
- MLA Formatting and Style Guide
- MLA In-Text Citations: The Basics
- MLA Formatting Lists
- MLA Formatting Quotations
- MLA Endnotes and Footnotes
- MLA Works Cited Page: Basic Format
- MLA Works Cited Page: Books
- MLA Works Cited Page: Periodicals
- MLA Works Cited: Electronic Sources
- MLA Works Cited: Other Common Sources
- MLA Additional Resources
- MLA Abbreviations
- MLA Sample Works Cited Page
- MLA Sample Paper
- MLA Tables, Figures, and Examples
- MLA PowerPoint Presentation
- MLA FAQs
- MLA Classroom Poster
- MLA 9th Edition Changes
- MLA 8th Edition Changes

It is your responsibility to determine, for instance, how to cite poetry and prose in your essay, when to use a block quotation for poetry or prose, how to format the Works Cited page and so on. This website goes over everything you will need, and even has an “MLA Sample Paper” for you to peruse so that you can make sure your essay is formatted correctly. If you need extra help, you can email me and/or contact the writing center. If there are more than a few MLA formatting errors in your essay, your grade will be reduced proportionally, regardless of the content of the essay.

What follows are a few pointers, but they are not a replacement for your own work of consulting the Purdue OWL.

2. *Format of Titles of Literary Texts.* The titles of shorter texts, like lyric poems, are written in quotation marks: “Frost at Midnight.” The titles of longer texts, like very long poems, plays or novels, are written in Italics without quotation marks: *The Faerie Queene*, *Twelfth Night*, *Jude the Obscure*.

CHAPTER VIII. IN-TEXT (I.E., PARENTHETICAL) CITATIONS

1. *Integrating In-text Quotations.* When you cite poetry or prose in the body of your essay, via a parenthetical citation as opposed to a block quotation (see the Purdue OWL website on the difference), **always integrate whatever it is you quote into the syntax of your own sentences. Do not introduce a quotation with a comma, or simply by putting the quotation on its own following a period (free-standing quotations – quotations that stand on their own as complete sentences – are unacceptable).** In most cases, you can be selective as to what particular elements of the primary text you quote, and when, thereby arranging your evidence in such a way as to keep the flow of the essay smooth and easy. **A sentence of your own that ends in a comma, for instance, and that is followed, post-comma, by the quotation itself, in its entirety, needs to be reworked,** such that the comma is replaced by a colon, or such that the quoted material is reformatted so as to be grammatically assimilated into your own language. Otherwise, you have a comma splice: two independent clauses joined by a comma.
2. *Format of In-Text Citations.* Say you are citing the poem, in your text (i.e., not a block quotation), “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” by William Wordsworth. You are referring to no other poems by Wordsworth in the essay (if you were, you would have to specify which poem you were quoting in the parentheses). Your citation would look like this: the speaker of the poem claims to have “wandered lonely as a cloud” (Wordsworth, line 1). Note that there is a comma, in the parentheses, after the author’s last name and prior to the word “line” and the line number(s). When citing prose parenthetically within the text, you do not need the comma within the parentheses: e.g., Thoreau insists that he wanted “to live deliberately” in Walden (5). Here, the “5” means “page 5.” I do not need to insert the name “Thoreau” in the parentheses, moreover, because I have already mentioned his name in the same sentence, with the result that it is clear whom I am talking about. Nor do I need to include the title of his text, *Walden*, because I am only quoting from one text by Thoreau in this essay. If you have questions, email me.

3. In-text parenthetical citations generally appear at the end of sentences, not after the material is quoted.
4. *Supererogatory Punctuation in In-Text Citations.* Immediately preceding the parenthetical notation in an in-text citation, there should be no punctuation – **like ellipses dots** – inside the quotation marks. If the quotation *itself* ends with a question mark or exclamation point, then put that question mark or exclamation point within the quotation marks: it is the author's. Otherwise, such punctuation is part of *your* sentence and not the quoted material.
5. *Marking Line-Breaks in an In-Text Citation of Poetry.* When quoting poetry in an in-text citation, not a block quotation, separate each line by a slash, **with a space on either side** ([space] / [space]).
6. Follow these examples for in-text citations:

- a. Discussing *Gulliver's Travels* in a letter of September 1725 to Alexander Pope, Swift explains the theory of his satire: "I have ever hated all nations, professions, and communities and all my love is towards individuals" (2447).

[Here I will refer to your Works Cited list and see that this "letter of September 1725" is in the *Longman Anthology*, and I will know to look for it there on page 2447. There is no need to give the title of the source in the parenthetical notation, because you make it clear.]

- b. Swift's humor is often paradoxical, as in the following request from "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift": "To all my foes, dear fortune, send / Thy gifts, but never to my friend" (lines 67-68).

[Here I will refer to your Works Cited list and see that this poem, "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift," is in the *Longman Anthology*, and I will then be able to find lines 67-68. Again, there is no need to give the title of the source in the parenthetical notation, since I have mentioned it in the same sentence.]

- c. Human nature, for Swift, is innately envious, and thus he asks "[w]hat poet would not grieve to see, / His brethren write as well as he?" ("Verses," lines 31-32).

[Here you *do* need to give the title of your source in your parenthetical notation, because you do not make it clear in your discussion preceding the quotation. With this notation I will be able to refer to your Works Cited list and see that the poem, "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift," is in the *Longman Anthology*, and I will then be able to find lines 31-32.]

7. *Repetition of Quoted Material in In-Text Citations.* If you have already quoted a passage and then want to quote a word or phrase from that passage again, you do not need to repeat the parenthetical notation. Follow these examples, assuming that you've already

quoted, in full, the passage from Swift's letter of September 1725 to Alexander Pope.

- a. "Nations, professions, and communities," for Swift, represent groups in which pride flourishes.
 - b. Individuals begin to see themselves as superior to others once they identify themselves as members of "nations, professions, and communities."
 - c. Swift is referring to *Gulliver's Travels* when he claims that all his love is "towards individuals"; this claim, however, can also illuminate a reading of "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift."
 - d. It is not difficult to identify some of Swift's least favorite "professions": doctors, lawyers and ministers of state.
 - e. It is a remarkable claim to hate "all nations, professions and communities"!
 - f. What does it mean, then, to hate "all nations, professions, and communities"?
8. *Single versus Double Quotation Marks in an In-Text Citation.* Generally, for regular quotations, use double quotation marks, " "s. Single quotations marks, ' 's, are for quotations within quotations: e.g., In response to the news of Swift's death, his friends "hug themselves, and reason thus: / 'It is not yet so bad with us'" ("Verses," lines 115-16).

CHAPTER IX. BLOCK CITATIONS

1. For any quotation that would fill **more than four full lines in your paper**, whether poetry or prose, use a **block quotation**, which should be indented once and double-spaced.
2. In a block quotation, **do not use any quotation marks**, unless the material quoted already has quotation marks around it, such as a prose passage that includes a character's speech along with, say, some narrated text. However, if your entire block quotation consists solely of the speech of a single character, you do **NOT** need to use double quotation marks.
3. In a block **quotation**, **parenthetical notation always goes outside the closing punctuation.**
4. Like regular quotations, block quotations must not be free-standing; introduce and integrate them into your writing.
5. When quoting *poetry* in block quotation form, reproduce it *line by line*, as it appears in the original text.
6. Only quote material that you will discuss or that is indispensable to the clarity and spirit of the quotation.

7. *Do not* begin a new paragraph immediately following your block quotation. As always, you must perform close reading of your quotations before moving on.
8. Follow these examples for block citations:
- a. In “Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift,” Swift inveighs against the contradictory nature of human beings, who value themselves in relation to others rather than according to their own merits:

Vain humankind! Fantastic race!

Thy various follies, who can trace?

Self-love, ambition, envy, pride,

Their empire in our hearts divide:

Give others riches, power, and station

'Tis all on me a usurpation.

I have no title to aspire;

Yet, when you sink, I seem the higher. (lines 39-46)

[**Note:** If you quote these eight lines, all of them must be necessary for your close reading.]

- b. Discussing *Gulliver's Travels* in a letter to Alexander Pope, Swift explains the theory of his satire:

I have ever hated all nations, professions, and communities and all my love is towards individuals. For instance, I hate the tribe of lawyers, but I love Councilor Such-a-one, Judge Such-a-one, for so with ... English, Scotch, French, and the rest. But principally I hate and detest that animal called man, although I heartily love John, Peter, Thomas, and so forth. This is the system upon which I have governed myself many years ... and so I shall go on till I have done with them. (2447-48)

[Note: Again, all of what you quote must be necessary for your ensuing close reading.]

CHAPTER X. WORKS CITED

1. The Purdue OWL website provides plenty of examples of Works Cited entries. Here are a few common varieties.
 - a. *A novel prepared by an editor.* Bronte, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*, edited by Margaret Smith, Oxford UP, 1998.
 - b. *A poem in an anthology.* Whitman, Walt. "I Sing the Body Electric." *Selected Poems*, Dover, 1991, pp. 12-19.
 - c. *An article in a scholarly journal.* Duvall, John N. "The (Super)Marketplace of Images: Television as Unmediated Mediation in DeLillo's *White Noise*." *Arizona Quarterly*, vol. 50, no. 3, 1994, pp. 127-53.

CHAPTER XI. REVISING AND PROOFREADING

1. Effective revision and proofreading is often what separates strong papers from weak ones. When you are ready to revise, use the "Writing and Revising Checklist" that I have provided. The following tips may also help you improve your skills in these areas:
 - a. *Read Aloud to Determine Such Things As, Say, Comma-Placement.* Read your completed draft (whether rough or final) out loud slowly, either to yourself or to a friend, pausing to mark difficult, awkward or unclear passages. Then go back and revise them.
 - b. *Take Time away from Your Essay.* After completing a draft, set it aside – ideally for a day, but for a few hours at least. Do something else! It is far more productive to return to a draft with a fresh eye than to try to revise something you've just written: time off will help you see more clearly the *gaps* between your intended meanings and their written expressions.
 - c. *Reverse-Outlining.* Reverse outlining is accomplished by rereading a complete draft, determining the one cohesive sub-argument of each paragraph and, finally, writing that sub-argument out next to the paragraph in no more than one sentence. In the process, make sure that that paragraph contains nothing else but what is in the service of said sub-argument. Next, you can polish each paragraph by placing an appropriate topic sentence in it; and, last, you can rewrite the introductory paragraph so that it best represents and governs the substance of the body paragraphs and the essay as a whole.
 - d. *Grades and Proofreading.* **If you are concerned about your grade, you are strongly encouraged to give your essay drafts to educated and intelligent friends, colleagues and/or family. All good writers collaborate with other writers or editors, and you should make a habit of getting feedback from a variety of readers too, if you want to increase your chances of getting a good grade.** Readers can help you identify the areas of your

paper that are unclear or need to be developed further. However, many of these readers may be unable to thoroughly tutor you in basic English grammar and in how to construct and maintain an argument of literary analysis; these skills can only come with experience, a lot of reading, hard work and, if necessary, a professional, paid tutor.

CHAPTER XII. FINDING SOURCES (RESEARCH ESSAYS – I.E., USING SECONDARY TEXTS – ONLY)

9. Determine whether our library has the book or article you need via the library website (if you have trouble searching for books or journal articles online, let me know in advance). If our library does not have the text you need, that is perfectly acceptable. In such a case you will have to secure the desired book or article through CSU+. Getting an entire book CSU+ takes some time (a few days), **but getting a single journal article or a single chapter from a book (i.e., a book chapter copied for you and made available for download as a PDF) may take less than a few hours (and no more than twenty-four hours).**
10. Your best bet is to find a book or article through the MLA International Bibliography database available on our library website. If you have trouble accessing or using this database, let me know in advance. Please do not pick the first book or article you see on a search: find something that interests you; spend time locating the right secondary text for you. An article that is immediately available as a downloadable PDF – discovered, say, through the MLA International Bibliography database – may be convenient, but it is not the right choice simply because it is convenient. It may be helpful to begin with a Google search on a specific primary text in order to see, briefly and generally, what major criticism is out there and has been well received by the scholarly community; then, if you locate the title of an interesting book or article via the web (perhaps skimming some of its contents in Google Books), you can proceed to acquire it via our library.
11. Note: The MLA International Bibliography database is only a bibliographical search. It does not actually contain the intellectual content yielded in the search (though it will direct you to the databases that *do* contain said content if, in fact, our library subscribes to these databases). The actual intellectual content comes from scholarly journals digitized and made available online through electronic databases. These databases – which may be searched themselves instead of / in addition to searching the MLA International Bibliography – include Humanities International Complete, Academic Search Premier, JSTOR, Project Muse and Literature Criticism Online.
12. Generally, the chapter/article should have been written between 1960 and the present. More, the source **must come from a scholarly book or a peer-reviewed scholarly journal:** i.e., a print journal that is regularly digitized and available online (most scholarly journals), or a scholarly journal published exclusively online. If you are unsure whether or not your selection meets these criteria, ask me beforehand. Book reviews do not count.
13. Another great resource for finding secondary texts – after your own close-reading has been thoroughly considered and mapped out, at least roughly – are scholarly editions of the poetry and/or prose of a given author.

CHAPTER XIII. MISCELLANEOUS REMINDERS

1. *Possession.* “Its” is possessive; “it’s” means “it is.”
2. *Hyphens.* When “the eighteenth century” stands on its own as a noun, do not use a hyphen. When the century serves as a modifier, as in “eighteenth-century literature,” use a hyphen.
3. *Number and Agreement.* Keep number constant. If you are writing about one person, do not switch to a plural pronoun, “they” or “their.” Use “he or she,” “one,” “his or her,” etc.
4. *Punctuation and Quotation Marks in General.* Commas and periods, in American English, precede a set of closing quotation marks – “They Flee From Me,” and “They Flee From Me.” – not “They Flee From Me”, or “They Flee from Me”.
5. *Use, utilize, et c.* When writing about texts, avoid the words “use,” “utilize,” “employ,” etc. Do authors really “use” things in their writing? For example, does Keats really “use” a nightingale? Invariably, your sentence will be stronger if you take out the author and the word “use” and just start with the thing itself. Instead of “Keats uses the nightingale to represent,” just start with the nightingale: “The nightingale represents.” (Authors do “use” metaphors, images, etc., but especially in short papers that don’t involve huge amounts of research, it’s almost always best to leave the dead author out of it and just focus on the living text.)
6. *Use your own voice.* If you want to write well, and find your voice, **write how you think, how you speak**, cleaning up after the fact, of course, any errors, or confusions, or repetitions, or vulgarities or whatever else obviously needs to be repaired. Do not try to sound like an academic. You will almost certainly sound confusing.
7. *Conjunctive Adverbs.* Conjunctive adverbs, such as *also, however, otherwise, consequently, indeed, similarly, likewise, furthermore, moreover, hence, nevertheless* and so on, are punctuated as follows: when a conjunctive adverb – say, *however* – connects two independent clauses in one sentence, it is preceded by a semicolon and followed by a comma: e.g., “The speaker tends to be duplicitous and unreliable on the whole; however, there are certain moments in the poem when he is made to seem relatively sincere.”

CHAPTER XIV. GRADING

1. For grading policies, see the SHC Chapter entitled “Definition of Grade Symbols and Evaluative Criteria.”

Chapter XV. WORD PROCESSING

1. **All essays must be written in the version of Microsoft Word available in the Office 365 software package.** CSUS provides Office 365 for free. You can download Office 365 at <https://www.csus.edu/information-resources-technology/software-catalog/>. Note that if you use another word processor, such as Google Docs, there is a high chance that parts of your essay will be formatted incorrectly and therefore subject to penalties.

Revising Checklist

Introduction

- › Does the first paragraph clearly and gracefully introduce the *topic* and present the thesis?
- › Does the thesis statement set forth an *argument* or a *statement of fact*? Could someone potentially disagree with your thesis? If not, you have probably set forth a statement of fact.
- › Is your argument *specific*, or general?
- › Does your thesis matter to you? Would it matter to other members of the class?
- › Does the thesis give the reader a sense of what the *structure* of the paper will be?

Body

- › Look at each paragraph. What is its *main idea* or *point*? Is that point clearly stated at the beginning? Does the topic sentence serve as a “*mini-thesis*”?
- › Is the topic sentence a *statement of fact*? If so, revise!
- › Does the topic sentence support and work with the *thesis statement* of the paper?
- › Does each paragraph flow logically from the preceding paragraph and into the succeeding paragraph? Does the topic sentence provide a *transition* that clearly and explicitly connects the point of the preceding paragraph to the point of the present paragraph?
- › Are the quotations *introduced* clearly and *integrated* smoothly into the paper? Are there any free-standing quotations?
- › Do you perform close readings of every passage you quote, and do your close readings clearly and explicitly *support your larger argument*, both within the paragraph and in the paper as a whole?
- › How does the draft hold together? Are there places where the argument feels rushed or unclear? Does the essay lose its focus or shift its focus at any point?
- › Does the essay contain any *unnecessary summary*?
- › Are there instances of *vague language*? (Look out for buzzwords: “certain,” “specific,” “different,” “various,” “many,” “true,” etc.) Whenever possible, be specific.

Conclusion

- › Does it pull ideas together, restate a key idea in a new way, and/or suggest how your reading relates to larger issues of interest to you and your readers? Or is it merely repetitive?

Overall

- › Does the essay successfully address the specific subject it sets out to analyze?
- › Does the essay *interpret* the text, or merely paraphrase and/or summarize? Have you merely translated what the text says, or have you analyzed *how* the text says what you think it says?
- › Does the essay *fully develop* the thesis it sets forth in the beginning?
- › Are there alternative ways the paper could be structured in order more effectively to argue the thesis? Does the thesis need to be changed to reflect the actual argument of the paper?