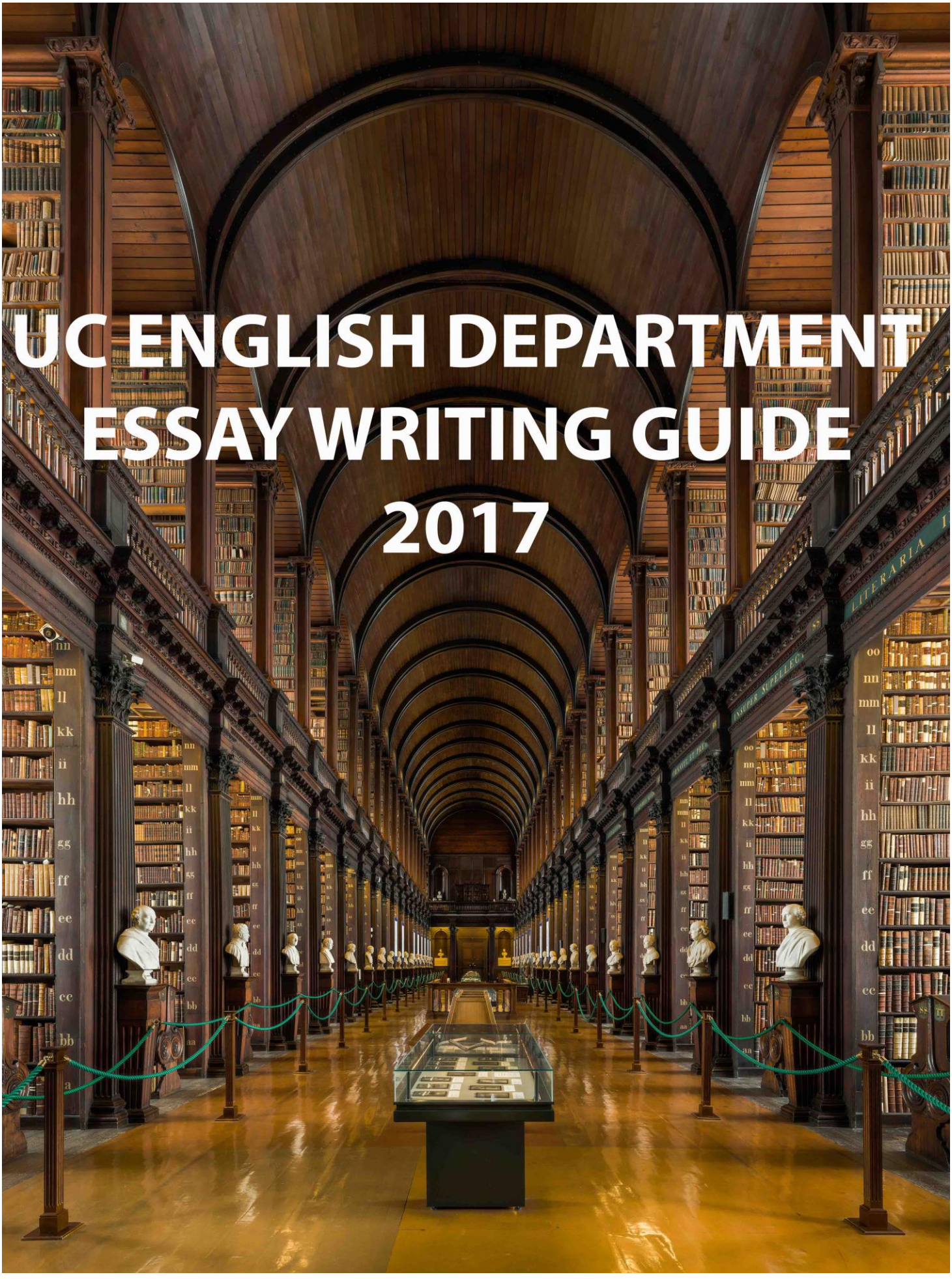

UC ENGLISH DEPARTMENT ESSAY WRITING GUIDE 2017

Contents

1. What is an English Essay?

The essays you write for your English courses are about *your* ideas, your analysis of the texts. In chemistry, when you put lithium in water, it blows up every time. Literary Studies and Cultural Studies do not work in the same way – there are many interpretations and analyses of texts that may be plausible and even compelling.

However, this does not mean anything goes! Good literary and cultural criticism makes arguments about texts and then *backs up those claims* through careful textual analysis. Herman Melville's novel *Moby-Dick* is about many things – industrial capitalism, madness, masculinity, ecological destruction, Romantic psychology – and all of these ideas can be supported by careful analysis of the text. But *Moby-Dick* is in no way a novel about how to build a supercomputer or German foreign policy in the Weimar era. The text just does not bear those claims out.

Michael Bérubé, a professor at Pennsylvania State University, offers a wonderfully detailed description of what an essay is and what it does in his book *What's Liberal About the Liberal Arts?* He begins by noting how an essay must have an argument and how to start formulating a good argument:

> I tell students it often helps to develop a thesis by imagining other readers who might disagree with it. What, I ask them, do you want to tell us about the book in question,

> and why should we believe you? Is there another way to read the book, a way you find mistaken, partial, or downright unsavory? Do you want to make sure we aren't persuaded by that other way, with all the consequences it might entail, whatever those might be? (110).

Putting forward an argument means that you need to risk being wrong. "*Hard Times* is a novel about a teacher" is not an argument; it is a statement of fact. "*Hard Times* critiques rote learning in favour of what would come to be known as a Montessori approach to education" makes a claim about the novel that could be wrong; now you have an argument.

Not only must the essay put forward an argument, it must make use of appropriate evidence. What Bérubé looks for in essays, we in the English Department at UC also look for in essays: "My most important criterion is that of plausibility; I want to see how judiciously and carefully students cite the text in order to bear out their assertions or to direct their hypothetical readers' attention to what they think are the text's crucial passages" (110). In other words, the claims you make in your argument must be borne out by evidence taken directly from the text.

Literary and cultural texts do not exist in a vacuum. A novel or a TV programme emerges from a number of overlapping social, cultural and historical contexts. Not only do we care about the formal composition of texts – their exact wordings and workings – but we also care about what texts can tell us about the world

from which they come. Bérubé describes his way of explaining essays to his students as follows:

> I ask them not to restate their thesis in their concluding paragraph or paragraphs, but to use their conclusions to address a particularly knotty problem in the text or to suggest the broader implications of their line of inquiry. I tell students straightforwardly that I tend to be especially impressed by papers that ask themselves the simple but profound question, so what? If we see a novel this way, what does that tell us about X? Why should we bother to argue this kind of point in the first place? And finally, I suggest that a short piece of literary criticism should leave its reader wanting to reread the text it discusses, having induced the reader to mutter to himself or herself, "Hmm, I didn't catch that on the first time through" (110).

That is, a good piece of literary or cultural criticism never "takes the fun out" of a text but rather *improves* subsequent readings of the text in question by giving more careful and considered attention to the text.

Works Cited

Bérubé, Michael. *What's Liberal About the Liberal Arts? Classroom Politics and "Bias" in Higher Education.* New York: W. W. Norton, 2006. Print.

2. The Essay-Writing Process

An essay for university-level English requires more than a demonstration of reading comprehension; it requires that you make an argument about the significance of what you read or view. Rather than focusing on reading comprehension, your essay will focus on two main areas of investigation:

1. how the text creates effects in its reader or audience: such effects include meanings, feelings and impressions;
2. how the text reflects and represents the history and society in which it was created.

In other words, your essay will analyse *how and why* the brute facts of the text – the "who-what-when-where" – relate to its context, and how the text in turn impacts upon, and has significance for, its readers.

2.1 Question Analysis: Key Terms

Assess: evaluate; appraise; determine the *significance* of a factor in a given situation. For example, "assess the importance of class differences in *Pride and Prejudice*."

Compare: look for similar features and characteristics, or elements in common. You are asked to identify and comment on

similarities and differences between things compared. Comparison entails *more than neutral description and observation* – it entails *characterizing the significance and meaning* of similarities and differences.

Contrast: look for dissimilarities, differences or contradictions. As with "compare," you should move beyond neutral description and observation and *characterise the meaning and significance* of the differences.

Critique: critically appraise or assess a text, argument or theory; this *requires a judgment* as to its correctness, value or implications.

Define: offer a *clear meaning or explanation* of a key term or concept; this *goes beyond the bare dictionary definition* to encompass specialised usage within the disciplines of Literary Studies or Cultural Studies.

Describe: provide a *systematic* account of the main features or characteristics and their implications.

Discuss: *identify a key problem or debate* and *analyse the pros and cons* by means of *a reasoned argument*, reaching a *firm conclusion* (does *not* mean a general description or a vague ramble around a topic).

Evaluate: develop a *critical assessment* of an argument or theory, and a *judgment* based on evidence of its merit or correctness. You will not be neutral; you will take a stand.

Explain: *clarify* and *interpret* a problem or event, answering the questions *how?* and *why?*

Justify: offer arguments and evidence to *support* a proposition while *refuting* opposing arguments. You will not be neutral; you will take a stand.

Outline: *systematically describe* an event, work, or argument to indicate its *significant* features.

Refute: offer arguments and evidence to *disprove* a proposition. You will not be neutral; you will take a stand.

Review: *systematically describe* a number of events, works, or arguments, *with a critical commentary.*

Summarise: give main points, facts, or idea concisely, *without elaboration or detail.*

2.2 Generating Ideas from the Text

Obviously the most important thing you can do to generate ideas and arguments for your essay is to read (or view) the novel,

poem, play, film, television programme or other cultural text you are writing about. In fact, you will need to do so more than once, since you cannot catch and remember every nuance or interesting element the first time round. While being guided by the classes you have attended, you must also look for relevant moments and examples not covered during lectures and tutorials.

The best approach is to read or view the text the first time for general comprehension: you should do this before attending lectures and tutorials on it. The second time you read or view the text, in preparation for writing an essay about it, you will be looking for the moments and examples that are most relevant to your topic; it therefore makes sense to have developed a working thesis for your essay before doing so.

2.3 Finding a Working Thesis

There are many ways to get started on identifying the main argument – the **thesis** – of your essay. Having first conducted a careful question analysis (see section 2.1 above), try asking yourself the following questions.

- What features of the text, and of your responses to and thoughts about it, seem to relate most closely to the key terms and tasks of the question? – beginning here will ensure your further thinking and research are relevant.
- What aspect of the topic interests you most? What aspect do you feel most confident about? – beginning here will stimulate your writing and thinking.

- What most puzzles you about the topic? Are there particular terms, concepts or ideas that you need to understand better, or to research or figure out, in order to be able to make headway on your essay? – beginning here will help eliminate conceptual or terminological blocks to your writing.

Having made notes on your responses to the above questions, try to formulate a **thesis statement** (see Section 3.3 for more on this). Your thesis statement should be your essay's essential answer to the demands of the question; it is also the idea that allows you to focus your close reading of the text. To prove your argument, you will need to analyse a number of examples taken from the text that have significant links to the Big Idea that your thesis puts forward.

2.4 Locating Examples

A thesis statement must be proven, and you prove it through careful analysis of evidence. In your search for useful textual examples, you should look for moments in the text that connect to that idea. You should train your eyes on the form and techniques of the text – on *how* the text represents the idea and how the multiple examples you have located fit together and drive toward a larger importance. Also look for those aspects of the text that connect to its larger cultural and historical context, in ways relevant to the topic.

2.5 Research

Even when your essay topic mainly requires you to focus on a single "primary" text (a novel, a poem or a film, for example), you will most probably be unable to analyse and understand the text really thoroughly, or to respond to the question fully, without at least some research into "secondary sources". These may include

- sources that improve your understanding of technical terms and concepts: for example, dictionaries and encyclopedias and glossaries of key terms in literary and cultural studies; theoretical books and articles; critical articles that make use of such terms and concepts;
- sources that provide contextual information (biographical, social, historical) about the author, the text or the topic you are dealing with.

There are two main routes for such research: the internet and the library. The first is a bit like supermarket shopping with a blindfold on: you cannot guarantee the value of what ends up in your cart. The second is like going to a specialist shop and speaking with an expert: it might seem intimidating at first, but with the right guidance, you will find precisely what you need, as well as learning how to use it.

Searching the UC library catalogue and databases will locate many sources that may be relevant, and your lecturer or tutor

will help you choose the right ones for your purpose, either by providing a reading list or through one-to-one consultation.

- The library's "How do I find …?" page is a good place to start: http://library.canterbury.ac.nz/services/ref/index.shtml.
- For guidance on how to develop good judgment about the value of electronic sources, see Section 8 of this Guide.

2.6 Planning

There are many different ways of drawing up a plan for your essay, including diagrams, bullet-point outlines or brief summaries of what each part of the essay will do. Experiment to find the one that works best for you – it will depend on what kind of brain you have! There are some good online resources on the topic of essay planning: for example,

- the essay plan template provided by "Study Gurus": http://www.thestudygurus.com/files/products/ESK/%5BTSG%5D%20Essay%20Plan%20Template.pdf
- suggestions for "mind mapping" provided by the University of Adelaide: http://www.adelaide.edu.au/writingcentre/learning_guides/learningGuide_mindMapping.pdf.

2.7 The Sequence of Your Ideas

- Your essay is not a detective story; you do not "save" the

solution for the last sentence. Your thesis statement – the argument you intend to prove through careful analysis of the evidence – comes in the essay's introduction.

- Try to avoid simply following the plot of the novel or movie or play, or the order of the poem on the page, as your organizational scheme: it is *your* argument that needs to generate the logical sequence of ideas.
- Do any of your points have to come first, because later points depend on them, modify them, develop them, or contrast with them?
- Are some points relatively general in character? If so, these should probably precede the very specific points. Similarly, the comments likely to be familiar to your reader should usually precede the less familiar aspects of your argument. Think of this as moving your essay from the known to the new, from the general to the specific.
- Is there an obvious order that the text, or the topic, demands? For example, chronological or historical, spatial, alternating between texts?
- Are there places where your argument will have to change direction in a major way? If so, where is the best place in the essay for that to occur, and how will you signal the shift in focus to your reader?

2.8 First Draft

In the process of writing you may find that your essay no longer argues along the lines of the first version of your thesis statement. Do not panic. You are not contractually bound to stick with the thesis statement or the plan you wrote for your first draft. Remember, this is a *first draft only*; there is nothing in it that cannot be rewritten, so do not worry about getting everything perfect. If something confuses or blocks your argument, or threatens to take it off in a totally different direction, then leave it and go on with a different part of the essay. Often, we cannot discover what we really think about something until we write about it. Re-read your essay to determine the *new* argument and revise your thesis accordingly.

2.9 The Purpose of Revision

The writer who sits down and writes a good essay in one sitting without any revision does not exist. Drafting and revision are the processes that allow you to craft the strongest and best-supported argument possible.

The purpose of drafting is to generate a starting point for careful analysis. In drafting, you generate the first steps of working through your thesis by engaging in as much evidence-based analysis as possible. The drafting process enables you to try out ideas *before* you turn the essay in. Quite often you will find that some paths are dead ends and others deserve greater attention.

The purpose of revision, on the other hand, is to focus

intently on proving your thesis. In revising, you keep (and improve) the elements that help to advance your argument; you remove or re-assess those that do not help; and you add claims, evidence and analysis that you now realise are important to making your case.

At the sentence level, do not fall in love with a particular sentence or paragraph to the extent that you keep it even though it does not help you prove your point.

2.10 How to Revise

Before the days of digital technology, essays were written by hand or on a typewriter: this forced the writer to make clear distinctions between earlier and later drafts, and revision was a more clearly staged process of reworking one document into a different one. Writing electronic documents makes revision both easier and harder: it is quicker to rewrite sentences and move whole passages around, but harder to get a clear overall sense of how a draft needs to change. This sometimes results in a failure to make the really big revisions – restructuring the argument, for example – that will change a "C grade" first draft into an "A grade" revised version!

One way to provoke yourself into reading, and therefore revising, your first draft in a thoroughly self-critical way is to print it out, and read the hard-copy as though you are the essay's marker. Then make a plan that revises the essay's structure, as well as individual sentences – and write your second

draft based on that plan.

In evaluating your first draft, ask yourself the following questions:

- How does each sentence and each paragraph help to advance my thesis? Am I making this *clear*? Am I *communicating* my meaning to the reader? (Making clear how each main point relates to the overall thesis is sometimes called "signposting": see Section 3.5.3.)
- Is every paragraph concentrating on analysis, not just plot summary or description?
- Have I explained my ideas as specifically and explicitly as possible, or am I still being too vague?
- Does every paragraph contain a sentence or two that announces the main point of the paragraph and responds to the question? (This is called a "topic sentence", and usually comes near the beginning of the paragraph: see Section 3.5.1.)
- Have I introduced, contextualised and explained the quotations that I have supplied as evidence for my points? (A common mistake amongst inexperienced essay-writers is to provide a topic sentence, then stick a quotation in as if it speaks for itself, without explaining the relationship between the quotation and the point being argued.)
- Does my concluding paragraph show how I have advanced my thesis? (See Section 3.6.)

2.11 Final Draft: Proof-Reading

The final revision involves proof-reading for errors of various kinds: typos, missing words, spelling mistakes, misquotations, incorrect punctuation. These things irritate your reader and detract from the scholarly quality (and sometimes the sense) of your work, and therefore adversely affect your mark.

Use spell-check, but do not rely on it for everything. It will not pick up mistakes that are actually correct words in another context (for example the wrong “their”/”there”/”they’re”, “too”/”two”/”to” and so on). It often helps to ask a friend to proof-read your final draft – but only if she or he is (at least) as good a writer as you are! – because by this stage, you may be too close to the essay to see any mistakes.

The final step is to ensure that the essay is presented according to the conventions appropriate to English or Cultural Studies as an academic discipline (see Sections 9 and 10 of this Guide).

3. Essay Structure

3.1 Organization Overview

The standard approach to writing a formal academic essay can be summarised by the following schema.

Introduction: Presentation of the argument. The first paragraph (or perhaps two) should

- capture the reader's attention
- introduce the texts you will use as main sources of evidence
- signal any key terminological or conceptual issues
- assert a central argument which the rest of the essay will prove; in other words, provide a clearly articulated thesis statement
- foreshadow the points you will make in support of your thesis statement.

Body: Presentation of scholarly views, your position in relation or opposition to those views, the supporting evidence. Each paragraph in the body of the essay should contain

- a topic sentence that states a major conceptual claim and justifies its relevance to the thesis statement
- evidence to prove the argument – examples from the text(s) under analysis
- an analysis of the evidence that justifies its significance to the

argument
- a transition clearly linking this idea to the previous paragraph and to the next paragraph.

Conclusion: your final paragraph should
- reiterate (but not repeat word for word) your thesis statement
- recap the main points of the argument and show how they link together
- bring your overall argument to its most advanced point of development.

Works cited: should
- follow MLA style (see Section 9)
- include all works cited in the essay, whether by means of direct quotation, paraphrase, summary or mere passing mention.

3.2 The Introduction

A good introduction focuses on the precise meaning of the question, a brief summary of the material that you will investigate, and a general description of how the material is relevant to answering the question. Here are some helpful "*do*s and *don'ts*":
- DON'T employ sweeping generalisations such as "Katherine Mansfield is the greatest writer ever born in the Southern Hemisphere" or "Since the dawn of time, humans have told

stories about mysterious creatures." You cannot cover enough ground to substantiate these claims in a 1500- or 2000-word essay!

- DO introduce the primary texts that you will discuss.
- DO foreshadow the main points to be covered – offer a preview of significant claims – in the order in which you will discuss them.
- DO introduce any central issues of terminology or critical dispute without going into detail (that happens in the body of the essay).
- DON'T introduce your essay using the highly schematic "First I will do X, then I will do Y, then I will do Z. In doing so I will prove A." In English and Cultural Studies, you are partly assessed on your ability to create a structure and argument that suits your particular findings about your particular topic – rather than following a formula mechanically.
- DON'T begin your essay: "The dictionary defines...." Dictionary definitions are for everyday use: at University, you are learning how to engage with expert, specialised fields of study, and therefore you should be using your key terms in ways that will not be covered by ordinary dictionaries.
- DON'T begin your essay with general information (the author's date of birth, the novel's publication date, the location of the story) unless it is specifically related to the essay topic. From the outset, your introduction needs to tell your marker that you are focused on the specific issues identified in the question. Most often, the year of the author's birth (for

example) will be utterly irrelevant to your argument.

- DON'T get blocked by trying to complete or perfect your introduction during your first draft; at that early stage you will probably find that your ideas are not yet clear enough to write more than a rough introduction to a likely essay. Writing the first draft of an essay is, for most people, a "heuristic" process – meaning that it helps you figure out what you think, rather than simply expressing something you have already figured out. Often, then, it makes sense to leave the introduction relatively vague or unfinished until you have completed a full first draft of the body of your essay.

3.3 The Thesis Statement

The most important part of your introduction – in fact the single most important element in your whole essay – is your thesis statement, which usually comes at the end of your introduction. Your thesis statement asserts the central argument that the rest of the essay will seek to prove and develop. It is the motive force of the essay – it drives your essay through its analysis and to its conclusion. Without a thesis statement, your reader (and you) will have no clear sense of your argument. A thesis statement should be arguable – that is, it could be proven wrong. In other words, plot summary *is not* a thesis.

3.4 The Body

The body of your essay should feature your analysis of the evidence.

Avoid extensive plot summary; plot summary is not analysis. Novels, poems, and plays are made out of words – words should be your evidence. An essay on literature should analyse central themes, ideas, characters, and scenes using *the novel's language itself* as evidence. Films and television programmes are made out of images and sounds – sounds and images should be your evidence. An essay on film or television should analyse central themes, ideas, characters, and scenes using the interplay of image and sound (dialog, music, special effects).

3.5 The Paragraph

Every thesis statement needs to be explored, qualified, developed and supported. This is done by organizing your ideas into paragraphs and then arranging them in a logical order to allow the fluent progression of your argument. Paragraphs have a distinct internal structure, as follows.

3.5.1 The Topic Sentence

Every paragraph has a topic sentence which is *your* major conceptual claim for that particular paragraph. It is usually the first sentence of the paragraph.

- A topic sentence should relate to the thesis statement in your introduction; the thesis statement will be the culmination of all your topic sentences.
- A plot point or event is *not* a topic sentence.
- A topic sentence is *your* idea, not a quotation from someone else.

The claim you make in your topic sentence is then explained, developed, supported and qualified in the paragraph.

3.5.2 Evidence

A paragraph deals with evidence: examples and quotations. Ensure that the evidence you cite is relevant to the topic sentence. It may not always be obvious that references to the text support the point you are making:

- the relation between your point and your quotations must be explained and analysed, and this analysis connected to previous points and the overall argument.
- if your evidence involves a summary of an event or part of the plot, do not simply state what happens. Explain how and why it is important to your argument.

3.5.3 Signposting

The end of the paragraph shows (or "signposts") how you have advanced your thesis claim. Re-engage your thesis claim (but do not repeat it word for word!). Show how your major ideas relate to each other and how subordinate ideas fit into the major ones.

The paragraph should close on *your* ideas, not on a quotation.

3.5.4 Transitions

Once you have fully explained the relevance of the main idea of one paragraph, and developed it with sufficient evidence, you should link or connect it to the main idea of the next paragraph. Make transitions through the relationship between the ideas your essay engages rather than through plot points. *Do not*, however, introduce the topic of your next paragraph at the end of the one before: introduction of the new topic belongs in the paragraph that deals with it.

Ways to ensure that your essay logically moves from one point to the next include:

- repetition of key words or phrases from the last sentence of one paragraph in the first sentence of the next
- "signposting" the relationship between the point you have just made in one paragraph, and the point you intend to make in the next, by using words and phrases such as *moreover, for example, in addition, finally, however, on the one hand, on the other hand, similarly, by contrast, thus, therefore.*

3.6 The Conclusion

In the conclusion of your essay,

- tie the threads of your argument together
- remind your readers of the significant claims you made in the

essay

- avoid mechanical approaches such as, “In this essay I have demonstrated X, Y, and Z, and therefore...”
- *do not* restate your thesis statement word for word; instead, *reword and expand* your thesis statement in the light of your preceding argument: your conclusion should give the impression that the thesis you started with in the introduction has been tested and enriched by the various points, analyses and evidence provided in the body of the essay
- if possible and appropriate, leave the reader with a provocative “big picture” insight borne of your discussion; while your essay is limited to a particular “test case,” its ideas apply generally – cast your net wider in the conclusion.

4. Supporting Your Argument

There are three methods for presenting evidence and supporting ideas from primary and secondary texts in an essay: paraphrase, summary and direct quotation.

4.1 Paraphrase

To paraphrase is to put the original text's ideas into *your* language. Use paraphrase when the original text has some detailed material you want to use in your argument.

Sometimes paraphrase will be longer than the original, such as when it is necessary to define a particular term within the material you paraphrase.

Paraphrase is an efficient method of integration of source material, as you show that understand it as you report it (putting it into your own words proves this). There is another benefit: the language will be in the appropriate style, *yours,* for the text you are writing.

Be careful when paraphrasing! because if you misunderstand the original, your paraphrase will make this evident to your reader.

Be sure to cite the source you paraphrase, because although you have put the ideas into your words, the ideas still belong to the original source. Failure to acknowledge the source

constitutes plagiarism (see Section 7).

Paraphrase can come in handy when describing social, cultural, and historical context. Paraphrase is less useful when dealing with the literary text, since the entire point of literary criticism is to engage the text's formal composition – its precise wording and structure.

Example:

The original:

> Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence (Benjamin 215).

The paraphrase:

> Walter Benjamin suggests that, no matter how accurately a work of art is copied, reproducing it separates it from its special historical context. What are primarily lost in the copy are the context of the work's original production and its history since that moment of production (215).

This is a paraphrase, using roughly the same number of words,

of a specific point made by Benjamin in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction".

4.2 Summary

Summary is when you report the ideas of a source in a condensed, selective form, using your own words and phrasing (essentially a condensed form of paraphrase).

Make use of summary when you want to report some important points from a source in a concise manner. Summary can be particularly useful when you wish to narrate elements of the plot of a novel, or to describe an event or a character, with the kind of brevity required to back up a particular point you are arguing.

Different lengths of summary are appropriate for different purposes, but summary should always be shorter than the original.

As for both quotation and paraphrase, you must cite the source of the material that you summarise.

Example:

> In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the unhealthy quality of the usurper's reign is suggested by many distortions of the natural order of things: terrible storms, darkness during the daytime, horses that eat each other, and a falcon killed by an owl (2.4).

This is a summary, in a single sentence, of a long dialogue between Ross and an Old Man in Act 2 Scene 4 of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

4.3 Quotations

In English essays, the most common form of evidence provided to substantiate your argument will be quotations from the primary text. It is therefore vital that you learn how to integrate and make use of quotations correctly and effectively.

- Prepare the reader for the passage by succinctly describing the content of the passage you are about to quote.
- Give the smallest portion of the passage necessary for your purposes. If you must use a long passage, break it up into smaller parts, if possible, and deal with the parts one at a time.
- Make sure that the syntax (sentence structure) of the quoted passage fits the syntax of your own content. The rules of grammatical coherence are not suspended when you use a quotation.
- Do not assume that the passage speaks for itself. Tell your readers what they are supposed to get from the passage. You should not end a paragraph with a quotation.
- Be careful to record accurately the original wording the quotation and use quotation marks and other notation where necessary.

4.3.1 How to Format Quotations

Prose:

- if you are quoting fewer than five lines, simply place the quotation in quotation marks, and put the page reference in brackets immediately after it. You should either introduce the quotation with a colon (:) or fit it into the grammar of your sentence.
- If you are quoting more than five lines, begin a new line and indent the entire quotation, introducing it with a colon (:) or fitting it into the grammar of your sentence. **Do not add quotation marks;** the indentation indicates that it is a quotation. As usual, put the page reference in brackets at the end of the quoted passage.

Poetry:

- If you are quoting three lines of verse or fewer, you should place your quotation within quotation marks in your text. Because you are not setting out the quotation line by line, you should indicate each break between lines of verse by means of a slash (/). For example: “On Tuesday last, / A falcon, tow'ring in her pride of place, / Was by a mousing owl hawked at and killed.”
- If you quote more than three lines of verse, begin a new line, indent the whole quotation and reproduce line breaks exactly.

- You should either introduce the quotation with a colon or fit it into the grammar of your sentence.
- If you are quoting irregularly spaced verse, however long the quotation, ensure that indentation, spacing between the lines, and spacing between words and phrases are reproduced accurately.

4.3.2 Integrating Quotations

Consider the following sentence:

> The artilleryman seems to be influenced by evolutionary theory when he thinks of humans as animals "it isn't all of us that are made for wild beasts" (Wells 119).

In this sentence, the grammar of the quoted material and the essay do not match. In revising this, the first step is to relate the grammar of the quotation to that of your own sentence in one of the following ways:

- using appropriate punctuation:

  The artilleryman seems to be influenced by evolutionary theory when he thinks of humans as animals: "it isn't all of us that are made for wild beasts" (Wells 119).

- rewriting your sentence in such a way that it connects grammatically with the quotation:

  The artilleryman seems to be influenced by evolutionary theory when he thinks of humans as animals, for example when he says, "it isn't all of us that are made for wild beasts" (Wells 119).

- selecting a part of the quotation that fits the grammar of your sentence more easily:

  The artilleryman seems to be influenced by evolutionary theory when he remarks that those who survive under the Martians will need to be like "wild beasts" (Wells 119).

Note: The most effective solutions, the last two, describe the *relationship* between the idea and the quotation in a more detailed and more precise way – and thereby contribute better to the argument.

4.3.3 Modifying Quoted Material

A direct quotation reproduces the source material exactly. Sometimes, however, you may need to cut out unnecessary elements in a long quotation, or else to add words to make quoted material fit the grammar of your own sentence. When you do this, you must make clear to your reader what belongs to the

original quotation and what you have changed:

- use ellipsis (that is, three full-stops …) to show where cuts from the original have been made;
- place square brackets [ ] around any words or phrases or letters you add to the original.

In doing so, of course, bear in mind that you *must retain* the original *meaning* of the quoted material.

In the following example, note how the quotation has been integrated into the writer's sentence structure using ellipsis and [] where necessary:

> There was a sharp contrast between the colder climate of Elizabeth's reign and the relative warmth of her father's. As a result, Shakespeare would have grown up with a generational sense that a previously fertile, temperate and reliable natural environment had been replaced by freezing temperatures, blighted harvests and sudden, wild storms. For example, at the age of 24 he would have been absorbed, like all English people of his time, by the drama of the impending Spanish invasion, whose defeat was achieved not primarily by naval defences but by stormy weather. "The great gales [of August 1588]", writes Brian Fagan, "destroyed more of the Spanish Armada than the combined guns of English warships" (xvi). Fifteen years later Shakespeare describes, in *Othello*, a sea storm in which the Turkish fleet is "so banged" by the "desperate tempest … / That their designment halts" (2.1.21-2).

5. Style

As a student in the English Department you will learn how to recognise the impact of different "registers", or styles of writing, upon a reader. You need to be sensitive to this not only in your reading of texts, but also in your own writing. The style appropriate to one mode of writing may not be suitable for another. Academic style fits the context of university work and the expectations of its audience – the case of an essay, your marker. Accurate, grammatical sentences, clear expression and formal register fit with presenting an argument that you want to have taken seriously and understood in an academic context.
In the essays you write for the English Department, your grammar, style, and tone will be more formal than in other kinds of writing you may be producing: for example tweets, texts, facebook updates, emails and blog posts; also fiction, poetry or other creative writing.

5.1 Person

Your choice of "person" – that is, the way you refer to yourself in your writing – will affect the overall tone of your essay.

- Use of the "first person" ("I", "we" or "us") is welcome in most English and Cultural Studies courses (but check with your lecturer or tutor if you are not sure). But be aware of the following:

    - overuse of "I" can lessen the impact of an argument by making it seem too subjective, too much like personal opinion rather than reasoned and proven argument. While you may opt to use "I," you will need to space out its appearances judiciously.
    - "we" and "us" can sound a bit too grand (as if you are a member of the royal family) or presumptuous (as if you are assuming the reader agrees with you rather than recognizing it is your task to persuade her or him.
- For the most part, the second person – "you", sometimes used in poetry – is too conversational for an academic argument and you should not use it in essays.

5.2 Voice: Passive or Active?

The "passive voice" occurs when you combine some form of the verb "to be" with a past participle. In doing so, the passive voice turns the object of the sentence into its subject. For example, many first-year essays use the passive like this: "The painting is described by Wilde". In this sentence, "is" (to be) + "described" (past participle) = passive voice. Oscar Wilde wrote *The Picture of Dorian Gray* – he is the agent in the sentence, but he is not its grammatical subject. To rewrite the sentence in "active voice" would produce the following: "Wilde describes the painting" – this is more direct, more vigorous and more concise, as the term "active" implies.

It is very common for inexperienced writers to overuse the passive to try and create an impression of objectivity; in English essays, however, the active is usually preferred as it is clearer and more direct.

Over-reliance on the passive voice can weaken your essay because it prevents you from advancing clear and coherent cause-effect relationships. As Edward Tufte puts it in *Beautiful Evidence,*

> Although often a useful writing technique, passive verbs also advance *effects without causes* ... To speak of ends without means, agency without agents, actions without actors is contrary to clear thinking. If the issues at hand involve responsibilities or decisions or plans, causal reasoning is necessary. The logic of decisions is "If we do such-and-such [cause], then we hope this-and-that will happen [desired effect]." And the logic of responsibility is the logic of the active voice: *someone did* or *did not do* something. Alert audiences should watch out for causality from nowhere and its sometime assistant, the passive voice (142).

Tufte's concern with "causality" gives us a way to analyse sentences in which passive voice appears. For example, consider this sentence, from an essay on H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds,* which uses the passive voice (bold) twice: "It **is discovered** that the 'meteor' is radioactive and the creatures

that emerge from it soon begin to attack earth as all hell breaks loose and the military **is called in."** Passive voice makes it difficult to determine responsibility. *Who* discovers that the meteor is radioactive? *Who* calls in the military? Because these steps in the cause-effect chain are not clear, the essay faces difficulties in advancing its argument.

The following are examples of ideas presented both in passive and active voice:

> **Passive:** "It *is discovered* that the 'meteor' is radioactive."
> **Active:** "The townspeople *discover* that the 'meteor' is radioactive."

> **Passive:** "In the second stanza of the poem a nostalgic tone *is produced* by the images and scenes from childhood."
> **Active:** "In the second stanza of the poem, images and scenes from childhood *produce* a nostalgic tone."

> **Passive:** "Tension *is increased* by the fragmentation of sentences and phrases towards the end of the last stanza."
> **Active:** "Towards the end of the last stanza, the fragmentation of sentences and phrases *increases* tension."

In each case, the active voice is clearer, more concise and more "to the point" than the passive.

Hence, you should use the passive only rarely; for instance, when you want to suppress responsibility for the action of the

verb: "Two completely contradictory meanings for the poem *are produced;* it remains impossible to decide which the poet intended."

5.3 Colloquialisms, Slang, Contractions and Abbreviations

Most academics consider the use of colloquialism, slang, contractions and abbreviations in academic essays too informal to be acceptable.

- A colloquialism is a phrase you would normally use in informal situations like conversation or an email or a tweet, and slang is a particular word of non-standard English. While it may be perfectly acceptable to use "sweet as" in conversation, you would not use it in a formal essay. Similarly, while you might tell your friends, "I got lost on my way home and took a Tiki tour through the red zone," you would not write, "King Lear takes a Tiki tour across the heath in the middle of a storm" in a formal essay.
- A contraction is a shortened form of a word or phrase, where missing letters are indicated by an apostrophe (’): in a formal essay you should write "do not" instead of "don’t"; "is not" instead of "isn’t" and so on.
- Abbreviations are also inappropriate in formal writing, so use "for example" rather than "e.g.", "that is" rather than "i.e.", "Nineteenth Century" rather than "19th Century", "and so on" rather than "etc." – and so on!

5.4 Specialist Terminology and Heightened Vocabulary

Specialist terminology – or jargon, to its detractors – can be very helpful in an essay, but you will need to be careful about how and when you use it.

In most English essays, your markers will expect you to make informed and appropriate use of the specialist terms to which they have introduced you during the course. If you remain unsure of the meaning or application of a term, you can either check with your lecturer or tutor, or consult an authoritative dictionary of critical terms, such as M.H. Abrams' *Glossary of Literary Terms* or Chris Baldick's *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*.

In small quantities, and appropriately used, heightened language can add to your essay, but all the impressive vocabulary in the world cannot overcome a bad argument. You will accomplish nothing but obscurity by packing your essay with obscure or over-elaborated words or phrasing. Here's a (slightly exaggerated!) example: "Due to the afore-mentioned concupiscent obliquity in verbiage, one may attribute a circumscriptive propensity for prurient discourse in this tome." This idea would be much more effectively rendered as follows: "These examples of bawdy word-play reflect an underlying focus on sex in the text."

6. Punctuation and Grammar

English essays require correct punctuation and grammar not just for the same of pedantry, but because these things are vital to clear, unambiguous and authoritative formal writing.

6.1 Apostrophes

The apostrophe (’) is used in two cases only:

1. In contractions, to show that a letter or letters have been omitted: e.g. can’t (cannot), won’t (will not), I’ll (I will), she’d (she would). In the style of formal writing required for an essay, you should not be using contractions (see Section 5.3) – except of course where they are reproduced in quoted material. In your own sentences, therefore, apostrophes will only ever appear in their second function: to show possession.

2. To show possession:

- For nouns that do not end in “s”, whether they are singular or plural, add an apostrophe after the last letter, followed by an “s”:
    - singular nouns not ending in “s”: “Mansfield’s stories”, “the dog’s tail”.
    - plural nouns not ending in “s”: “children’s stories”, “men’s writing”, “women’s writing”.
- For nouns that already end in an “s”, whether singular or

plural, add the apostrophe *after* the "s" and do not add another "s":

- singular nouns ending in "s": "Charles Dickens' novels", "the virus' mutations". [Note: adding a second "s" after the apostrophe in these cases is acceptable, but the rule is easier to remember if you just stick to one!]
- plural nouns ending in "s": "many students' essays", "these poets' names", "some cats' eyes".

If you are uncertain about where to place an apostrophe to show possession, try translating the phrase using "the --- of ---": "the stories of Mansfield" (so the apostrophe comes after "Mansfield"); "the novels of Dickens" (apostrophe after "Dickens"); "the writing of women" (after "women"). The only exception to this rule applies to possessive pronouns ("its", "theirs", "whose") – see the next section.

(Note: Do not use apostrophes to indicate a plural: "during the 1900's" should be written "during the 1900s".)

6.2 "It's" and "Its"; "They're" and "Their"; "Who's" and "Whose"

Personal pronouns (I, we, you, he, she, it, they) have their own forms to show possession (my, our, your, his, hers, its, theirs). None of these uses an apostrophe. This means that there is no need ever to confuse "it's" with "its", or "who's" with "whose":

- "it's" can only ever mean "it is"

- “its” can only ever mean “belonging to it”
- “they’re” can only ever mean “they are”
- “their” can only ever mean “belonging to them”
- “who’s” can only ever mean “who is”
- “whose” can only ever mean “belonging to whom”.

6.3 Titles

In English and Cultural Studies essays it is vital to indicate when you are referring to the title of a work, and you need more than just capital initial letters to do so: “Hamlet is insane” is a statement about the character Hamlet, whereas “*Hamlet* is insane” is a statement about the whole play.

It is also important to distinguish between part of a work and a whole work.

- *Italics* are used only for titles of whole works: books (novels or nonfiction), long (book-length) poems (for example *Paradise Lost* or *Leaves of Grass*), whole plays, films, paintings and television series. Also (for some reason!), the names of ships.
- Quotation marks (“”) without italics are used for parts of larger works: individual chapters, articles, essays or poems within a larger book; individual episodes of a television series.

6.4 Capital Letters

Capital letters should be used for the first word of a sentence and for proper nouns – the names of “unique entities”.

- The names of *particular* people and places, and of things such as books, artworks and films are proper nouns, and should be capitalised: Darwin, Wells, Swift, England, *The War of the Worlds, Gulliver's Travels.*
- Historical periods and major events are "unique entities" and thus given capital letters: the Renaissance, the Early Modern, the Middle Ages, World War I, the Vietnam War, the Industrial Revolution.

If you are not sure whether something is a proper noun, try putting *any* in front of it; if you can do that, you are probably not dealing with a proper noun or unique entity and the word should be in lowercase: "any revolution", but "the French Revolution"; "any novel", but "ENGL315 The Twentieth-Century Novel"; "any war", but "the Second World War", and so on.

When a proper noun comprises a whole phrase, capitalise every word except for articles ("the", "a", "an", "some"), conjunctions ("and", "or") and short prepositions ("of", "to", "at" and so on) – except where such words are the first word in a title, which is always capitalised:

- examples of capitalisation in book titles: *The War of the Worlds*, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, *The Making of the English Working Class*
- examples of capitalisation in names of historical events: the Wars of the Roses, the Treaty of Waitangi, the Council of Trent.

6.5 Line Breaks

There are two ways of indicating the end of a paragraph and the start of a new one: choose one or the other but not both!

1. A single line break followed by a tab indent for the first line of the new paragraph.
2. Two line breaks with no tab indent (in other words, a blank line between paragraphs).

6.6 Verb Tense

Literary and cultural criticism is written in the present tense. The general rule is simple: use the *present tense* when discussing, describing, or referring to anything in a text (no matter when or where it was written). Use the *past tense* only for historical assertions or actual events. For example:

- "In *The War of the Worlds* the astronomer Ogilvy insists that there is no life on Mars." (This is an occurrence within a text – so the present tense is used.)
- "Discussions about astronomy occupied a significant portion of popular science discussions in the Nineteenth Century." (This is an historical assertion – so it is rendered in the past tense.)

6.7 Tense in Quoted Material

Your quotations of primary texts should retain the original verb tense (in other words, in nearly every conceivable case, you will quote verbatim). This means that, even though it may seem odd, your sentences will use present tense even when the writer you

are quoting uses past tense:

> When Jonathan Harker arrives at Castle Dracula, he encounters a typically Gothic scene: "… there was the sound of rattling chains and the clanking of massive bolts drawn back. A key was turned with the loud grating noise of long disuse, and the great door swung back" (Stoker 43).

6.8 Sentence Fragments

A sentence in English must have a *subject* (the person or thing who enacts the verb) and a *predicate* (a verb) to be grammatically complete. In other words, a correct sentence will have something the sentence is about (a *subject),* and then it will say something about that subject (a *predicate).* Although written as if it were a sentence, a fragment is only part of a sentence, such as a phrase or subordinate clause. The following are examples of fragments or incomplete sentences:

- "These lines contain images and themes that are crucial to the poem as a whole. Repeated in every stanza." (The first sentence is complete, but the second has no subject or main verb: it needs to begin with "They are …".)
- "The poet then goes on to describe the scene. One of carnage and death, of violent destruction." (Here, again, the second sentence has no subject or predicate: it should begin, "It is …")
- "Even the title brings to mind images of life and death.

'Survivors' signifying an escape from a threatening situation, but also recalling those who did not survive." (In the second sentence, "signifying" and "recalling" are not main verbs but participles; replacing these words with "signifies" and "recalls" would make the sentence complete.)

- "The poet uses images of warfare and violence. Images which convey a strong feeling of horror to the reader." ("Which" or "that" followed by a verb means the clause is a dependent one, not a main clause, and thus it cannot stand as an independent sentence. Replacing "Images which" with "These images" would make the sentence complete.)

6.9 Subject-Verb Agreement

In a sentence the verb must *agree* with the subject; that is, the form of the verb must be the appropriate one for whoever or whatever enacts the verb. If the subject is singular, the verb must also be singular, even if a plural noun intervenes between the two. For example:

- The *imagery* used in all three poems *is* unusual.
- The *images* used in this poem *are* unusual.
- The *use* of short sentences and monosyllabic words *is* characteristic of Frame's style.
- *Feminist critics find* Frame an interesting writer for discussion.

6.10 Misplaced Modifiers

A "misplaced modifier" is a verbal phrase that does not refer clearly and logically to the words or phrases to which the grammar of the sentence relates it. For example:

- "Reading the novel closely, the characters seem flat and lifeless." (The grammar of this sentence implies that the characters are doing the reading, which makes no sense. The sentence should read: "Reading the novel closely, I find that the characters seem flat and lifeless.")

Misplaced modifiers can produce odd effects. Placing the modifying phrase closer to the word to which it refers will usually improve clarity. For example:

- "In our spare room we have two beds borrowed from friends propped up against the wall." (The friends are not propped against the wall! The sentence should read: "In our spare room we have, propped up against the wall, two beds borrowed from friends.")
- "Ugly and cramped, I crossed the flat off my list of rental options." (Unless the writer is herself or himself ugly and cramped, the sentence should read: "I crossed the flat, which was ugly and cramped, off my list of rental options.")

6.11 Semicolons, Colons and Dashes

The "semicolon" (;) is used in three somewhat different ways:

- to suggest a closer relationship than normal between two

complete utterances *which could otherwise stand as separate sentences.* For example: "By making his text so entertaining Defoe also adds to its authority; he involves his readers in the narrative to distract them from picking flaws in his representation of the truth."

- when it is necessary to separate a succession of parallel expressions: "In *Hard Times,* Dickens uses contrasting locations. The factory represents Utilitarianism; the circus stands for imagination; the coal pit evokes fate."
- to separate elements which themselves contain commas: "Beckett's plays tend to frustrate any audience expecting to find a linear, coherent plot structure; simple, lucid and conventional dialogue; or characters with clear and consistent motivation."

The "colon" (:) indicates a longer pause than a semicolon, and is used

- to introduce material that expands upon a statement just made: "The entire passage achieves a highly macabre tone: the images suggest death and decay, and the speaker appears racked by despair."
- to introduce quotations: "The first lines of the poem seem vague and abstract: 'The mumble of the fall of time is continuous.'"

Caution: It is easy to overuse semicolons and colons. In most cases a full stop, a conjunction ("and", "but", "because", "so",

"or"), or a comma is preferable.

6.12 Run-On Sentences and Comma Splices

Two of the most common punctuation errors made by inexperienced writers are the comma splice and run-on sentence.

A "run-on" sentence is where complete sentences have been simply run together. For example:

- "Edmund is a complex character although he behaves like a stereotyped villain at certain moments the audience has sympathy with him."
- "Kezia likes the lamp although she cannot light it it is a symbol of the imagination."

A "comma splice" is where a comma is used to join complete sentences:

- "Edmund is a complex character, although he behaves like a stereotyped villain, at certain moments the audience has sympathy with him."
- "Kezia likes the lamp, although she cannot light it, it is a symbol of the imagination."

In all the above cases, the sentences become both ungrammatical and unclear in meaning: it is impossible to tell how the points being made relate to one another.

To avoid a comma splice or a run-on sentence, use a semicolon, a full-stop, a colon or coordinating conjunctions: "and", "but", "for", "nor", "or", "yet", and "so". Note that "however" is not a coordinating conjunction – quite often

students will use it when they should use “but”.

Some options for the correcting examples above, then, would be as follows:

- “Edmund is a complex character: although he behaves like a stereotyped villain, at certain moments the audience has sympathy with him.”
- “Edmund is a complex character, because although he behaves like a stereotyped villain, at certain moments the audience has sympathy with him.”
- “Kezia likes the lamp, although she cannot light it. It is a symbol of the imagination.”
- “Kezia likes the lamp, although she cannot light it, for it is a symbol of the imagination.”

7. Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty: it occurs when you use somebody else's ideas and words as if they were your own, without acknowledgment. When you use someone else's words, or their ideas in your own words, you must cite your source. This applies equally to exact quotes and to paraphrases or summaries of significant information. In this way you will show your readers exactly *what* you have taken from *which* of the listed works, and enable them to distinguish between the ideas you have "borrowed" and the ones that are your own.

Across the university, plagiarism incurs stiff penalties. In the English Department, even accidental plagiarism will result in a **grade of E** for the essay and **possible failure** for the course. In the case of intentional plagiarism, which is a form of cheating, the ultimate penalty is **exclusion from the university**.

Plagiarism seldom goes undetected. Being very familiar with secondary sources in their area of expertise, lecturers and tutors who mark essays will often recognise the actual words or ideas that have been stolen. Even if they do not, they can almost always spot the difference in style between a student's writing and that of a published author. In addition, the internet makes it very easy for markers to locate and identify plagiarised material.

In the case of essays submitted electronically, plagiarism is even easier to detect. Essay submitted via Learn will be run through by anti-plagiarism software, such as Turnitin, which checks the entire essay for repetition of material from the

internet as well as from all other essays submitted electronically.

7.1 Intentional and unintentional plagiarism

Unintentional plagiarism can occur for various reasons. Sometimes students present the words and ideas of others as their own through lack of understanding of the correct way to reference sources. At other times, during the process of research, drafting and revision, quotation marks get deleted and what was once a quote from Jones appears to be your idea; this is the result of poor note-taking or referencing techniques during the research and redrafting phases of the essay-writing process.

Intentional plagiarism is a form of cheating, and can involve lifting full sentences or paragraphs or even, in the worst cases, entire essays.

Both forms of plagiarism incur penalties, although those for intentional cheating are of course heavier (see above).

7.2 How to Avoid Plagiarism

7.2.1 Good Note-Taking Practices

When you take notes from a text, or copy-and-paste from material online, make sure you always document precisely where the notes and quotations come from – in the form of *exact* urls and page numbers.

7.2.2 Knowing When to Cite

- Generally-accepted facts do not need to be cited. For example, it is simply a matter of common knowledge that Norman Kirk was New Zealand's Prime Minister from 1972 to 1974; that Adolf Hitler was Germany's leader during the Second World War; and that Canterbury suffered a series of damaging earthquakes during the years 2010 and 2011.
- However, arguments about and analysis of factual material – was Kirk an effective PM or not? what were the factors that brought Hitler to power? how have the earthquakes affected our society and culture? – are the sorts of things you must cite.
- Verbatim quotations must always be cited.
- Claims, ideas, information taken from your research must be cited even when you summarise or paraphrase them in your own words: the wording may be yours, but the idea comes from someone else.
- Do not forget to cite your primary source – the novel, play, or poem you are analysing – properly.

7.2.3 Using Material from Lectures

Students concerned about how and when to cite sources will sometimes ask: "do I have to reference material from lectures in

the course in my essays?" There are several points that need to be made in answer to this question.

- In general terms, most of the substance of your essay should come from sources other than lectures. Lectures are provided to introduce you to a topic or text, and to get you thinking; your essay should start from where the lecturer leaves you, and should therefore consist mainly of your own ideas, supplemented where appropriate by those of secondary sources.
- Nevertheless it is true that, to a greater or lesser extent, your reading of the text will usually be produced by assimilating the approach presented to you in lectures, but extending or expanding upon it through your own analysis and research. This is assumed when your essay is marked, so your assimilation and application of your lecturer's approach does not need to be acknowledged or cited explicitly in the essay.
- You should avoid quoting your lecturer's words directly: your marker wants to see your own ideas as they have developed out of what you have learnt, not the verbatim regurgitation of what you have been taught.
- Where you make use of ideas or quotations from secondary sources derived from a lecture, you should locate the original source, check the ideas or wording, and then cite that source. If you cannot do so, it is permissible to refer to such material as "(cited by Lecturername)", with a corresponding "Works Cited" entry for Lecturername and the relevant lecture (see Section 9.3 for how to do this).

8. Electronic Material in Academic Work

The appropriate use of electronic or internet-sourced material is one of the most important research skills you need to acquire. Familiarise yourself with the principles of **scholarly authority** and **peer review** outlined below and if you are in any doubt, check with your tutor or lecturer.

When you write coursework essays, you are engaging in academic research. This means that the sources of information you draw on must have the necessary **scholarly authority:** that is, your work must be based on serious research that has been authenticated by experts in the field. Scholarly books and articles published in hard copy – such as those available in journals and texts in the University Library – have to go through a process of **peer review:** this means their method of research and their findings have been verified by other experts in the field. Because anyone can publish anything on the internet, this process of peer review does not always apply in the case of online material; hence online material does not always carry sufficient scholarly authority to be cited in university-level essays.

8.1 What Kinds of Online or Electronic Resources Are *Not* Authoritative?

- Wikipedia: anyone can change Wikipedia entries, so there is no guarantee of accuracy, and no process of scholarly peer

review.

- Blogs: obviously the writer of the blog has complete, non-reviewed control over what appears in the blog, so again there is no peer review and thus no guarantee of scholarly authority.
- Online lecture notes from other universities: although lecturers will (usually!) be scholars in their field of teaching, they often simplify things or select particular aspects in order to make their material accessible, according to the particular aims of the course. In addition, lectures are not peer reviewed.
- Online student essays: obviously these have no more scholarly authority than your own ideas!

An additional shortcoming of the kinds of sources listed above this that they tend to provide material in what might be called a "pre-digested" form – that is, the information has been selected and shaped according to the purposes of the original writer of the source, which may not fit with your purposes in the essay (you'll notice, for example, that Wikipedia articles follow pre-designed templates or structures). You are best, therefore, to get as close as possible to an objective, authoritative, original source for information and ideas.

However, despite these shortcomings, you may certainly make *initial* use of any or all of the above, as means to generate ideas and directions as you begin thinking about your essay. For example Wikipedia is often a very helpful *starting-place* to get your ideas flowing (the others listed here are often too limited in their scope and purpose, and may send you in a false direction). If you find useful material in Wikipedia, use the citations to locate

the sources from which those elements are derived, and then look up those sources directly. Or else, having identified by reading Wikipedia the kind of information or ideas you need and who and where it can be found, use the University Library and databases, and internet tools like Google Scholar, to locate authoritative sources on those topics (see Section 2.5 of this Guide for more advice on "Research").

8.2 What Kinds of Online or Electronic Resources *Are* Authoritative?

- Online scholarly journals have the same status as hard copy ones. These will announce their "refereed" (peer-reviewed) status on their homepage or thereabouts.
- Electronically-obtained articles that derive from hard-copy scholarly journals – such as those you might get via the University Library's electronic databases, including Proquest, JSTOR or Expanded Academic index –have the same status as the hard copies, of which they are merely digital replicas.
- Online versions of authoritative scholarship originally published in hard-copy carry equal weight to their original form: examples include Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand, OED online, Oxford Reference Online and so on.
- For historical dates and facts, the online versions of newspapers, magazines and government announcements and publications can be relied on just as fully as their hard-copy versions.

To locate the above:

- for scholarly electronic resources available through the University Library, the "How Do I Find" page is a good place to start: http://library.canterbury.ac.nz/services/ref/index.shtml
- To start to develop a more thorough understanding of how to use the internet in a scholarly way, take the free online tutorial at Internet Detective: http://www.vtstutorials.ac.uk/detective/.

9. Citation and Referencing

It is vital to document your sources so that

- you identify where you have drawn ideas and information from – failure to do so is plagiarism (see section 7)
- your marker can check your accuracy in reproducing your sources
- your marker can distinguish your work from that of others.

The reader of your essay must always be able to trace any quotation or borrowed material back to its source. Citations and references make clear

- who wrote it – author name
- what they wrote – source title
- where they wrote it – page number or url
- when they wrote it – year of publication or of online access.

9.1 MLA Style

The citation (referencing) style for English courses is MLA (Modern Language Association). The fullest easily-accessible source for MLA style is at the OWL (Online Writing Laboratory) at Purdue University: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/. The guidelines and examples below, however, cover most of the issues you will face at undergraduate level.

MLA style is designed to be simple and uncluttered. To this

end MLA style uses a two-part system of citation:

1. **In-text citation**: short parenthetical citations, embedded within the text of the essay itself.
   - Usually, place *only the author's last name and the relevant page number(s)* in brackets at the end of the sentence that contains the quotation from or reference to your source – no commas, no "p." or "pg.".
   - Punctuation comes *after* the citation in brackets.
   - Endnotes or footnotes will therefore be used only for extra information or ideas that are relevant enough to be included, but not so central to your argument that they belong in the main text. In general, you should avoid adding material of this kind in undergraduate essays – which means that most often you will never use endnotes or footnotes unless you go on to postgraduate work.

2. A "**Works Cited**" list at the end of the essay that matches your in-text citations to detailed entries for each source in alphabetical order. This will include both primary texts you deal with and secondary texts you may use for support in your analysis.

9.2 In-Text Citation

The usual information contained in an in-text citation is: (Author-surname page-number). An example of this:

> In this way "Orwell identified, with remarkable precision, that our predominant attitude is one of ironic distance toward our true beliefs" (Zizek ix).

In the works cited list, the corresponding entry would read:

> Zizek, Slavoj. *The Universal Exception.* Continuum, 2007.

If you mention the name of the author in the context of your sentence, or it is obvious that you are continuing with discussing the same source, you need not provide the surname in citation again, or even (if you continue to reference the same page) the page number again.

With some electronic sources (especially PDF format files) you will have page numbers to refer to, but if the source isn't paginated you need not provide page numbers in the in-text citation, though you may cite by section or paragraph number or title if given.

If you are dealing with more than one source by the same author, include a short version of the title of the text within the citation to help with distinction between the sources. For example:

> Montaigne's understanding of the potential for barbarity

> within "civilisation" is portrayed, for instance, in his examination of the relative associations with ostentatious transport ("Of Coaches" 439-445), perfume and cosmetics used to cover commonplace stench ("Of Smells" 213), and the primitive understanding of medicine in the France of his day ("Of Experience" 520-522).

If you are dealing with different sources by authors with the same surname, you also will need to add further information to distinguish between these sources, in this case by adding the author's first initial. In this way, you could distinguish between Leonard and Virginia Woolf like this:

> In the late 1930s, faced with the rise of Fascism in Europe, the Woolfs' positions on pacifism began to diverge; on the one hand Virginia refused to align with artists who sought sanctions against Germany, while Leonard increasingly favoured rearmament as a necessary resistance to Hitler's aggression (V. Woolf 13; L. Woolf 243).

Some sources do not have a discernable author. In this case, you would cite a short version of the title instead, reflecting that the title will be at the beginning of the entry for the source in the Works Cited list. An example of this:

> Despite an apparent decline in reading during the same period, "the number of people doing creative writing – of

> any genre, not exclusively literary works – increased substantially between 1982 and 2002" (*Reading* para.15).

The source for this citation would be presented in the works cited list as:

Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America. National Endowment for the Arts, June 2004. Research Division Report 46.

9.3 Works Cited

The most basic formula for an entry in the "Works Cited" list for MLA is as follows:

Author, Title of source, Title of container (eg journal, book, database, website etc), Other contributors, Version, Number, Publisher, Publication date, Location.

Examples of the variations appropriate to different kinds of source are provided below. If you cannot find what you need here, consult the fuller list provided by the OWL at Purdue (you can find the url above in Section 9.1).

Please note that:

- titles of whole books, plays, book-length poems, films, television series and artworks should be in *italics*
- titles of chapters, articles, essays, poems and television

episodes, which are part of longer works should be in "quotation marks" with no italics

- "title case" should be used: that is, capitalise the first letter of every word in the title except articles ("the", "a", "an"), conjunctions ("and", "or", "so", "but") and prepositions ("to", "for", "with", "by", "at" and so on) – except where the first word in the title or subtitle is one of these, in which case it too should be capitalised.
- you should use a "hanging indent" – that is, if the entry takes more than one line, its first line should begin at the left margin and the remaining lines should be indented (right-click and choose the "paragraph" function in Word to choose this style).
- For electronic sources – e-books, electronically-delivered journal articles, and online material – you need to include a url or DOI number; it may also be useful to the reader to provide the date on which *you* accessed the item at the end of your entry.

A whole book:

Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms.* 6th ed. Harcourt Brace, 1993.

Note that this book has been through many revised editions, each of which has different page numbers, which is why the edition used in the essay must be specified. Very often the books you use will have only one edition, so there will be no need to

include this item in your entry.

A chapter in a book:

Bordo, Susan and Michael Swimmer. "The Moral Content of Nabokov's *Lolita*." *Aesthetic Subjects.* Edited by Pamela R. Matthews and David MacWhirter, U of Minnesota P, 2003, pp. 125-52.

A journal article:

Williams, Linda. "Of Kisses and Ellipses: The Long Adolescence of American Movies." *Critical Inquiry,* vol. 32, no. 2, 2006, pp. 288-340.

Ouellette, M. "Masculinities without Men?: Female Masculinity in Twentieth-Century Fictions (review)." *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 75 no. 1, 2006, pp. 357-358. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/utq.2006.0178 8 March 2017.

Note that the second example is an electronic version of an article, accessed via a database search.

A page on a website:

Lange, Dorothea. *The Migrant Mother.* 1936. Prints and Photographs Div. Lib. of Con. *Dorothea Lange:* Photographer of the People.

www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/128_migm.html 9 May 2007.

A broadcast or later release on other media:

Welles, Orson, dir. "The War of the Worlds." By H.G. Wells. Adapt. Howard Koch. *Mercury Theatre on the Air.* CBS Radio. WCBS, New York, 30 Oct. 1938. Radio.

"Hush." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* created by Joss Wheldan, performance by Sarah Michelle Gellar, season 4, episode 10, WB Television Network, 14 Dec. 1999.

Scott, Ridley, director. *Blade Runner.* 1982. Performance by Harrison Ford, director's cut, Warner Bros., 1992.

Note that the last example (above) is for a version of a film released in DVD format after its cinematic release. If the format seems unclear you may add a brief descriptor for the type of text to your entry (see above, where I've added "Radio").

Sources accessed from Learn

For sources that you access from your course's Learn website, please use the following format, adapting it to whichever of the sources you use. Your lecturer will probably provide details of where these texts have come from, but you need to cite them from where you found them, that is, from the Learn course website. Note that the last date in the citation relates to the date when **you** downloaded or accessed the text.

An example:

Ondaatje, Michael. From *Running in the Family.* 1982. ENGL201, The Essay and Beyond: Learn Website, U of Canterbury, learn.canterbury.ac.nz/mod/coursereadings/view.php?id=291085, 20 May 2012.

Lectures

See Section 7.2.3 of this Guide in regard to whether or not you need to provide citations when using material derived from lectures.

If it is necessary to cite from a lecture, your in-text citation would follow the standard form, and you'd have two possibilities for the bibliography citation, depending on whether you are citing the lecture as delivered or the lecture in note form, archived, for example, on Learn.

Examples of a lecture and the lecture notes online:

Armstrong, Philip. "Humanism and the Rise of the Essay (II)." Lecture, ENGL201, The Essay and Beyond, 2 March 2012, U of Canterbury, Christchurch, N.Z.

Or

Armstrong, Philip. "Humanism and the Rise of the Essay (II)."

Lecture, ENGL201, The Essay and Beyond, 2 March 2012, Learn Website, U of Canterbury, Christchurch, N.Z. learn.canterbury.ac.nz/course/view.php?id=1600&section=2, 2 May 2012.

Note: this list is separated into different categories for the purpose of clarification – you would usually just present one, alphabetically-arranged list of the sources you have cited in your essay.

10. Presentation

10.1 Hard-Copy Submission

If you are required to turn in a paper copy of the essay, you must personally deliver it to the essay box in the English Department. Do not slip the essay under your tutor's or instructor's office door. Do not entrust flatmates to drop it off for you. Please adhere to the following guidelines for paper presentation.

- Use the required cover sheet (see your Course Outline or assignment instructions for the specifics).
- On the cover sheet, please include the necessary information.
- Number the pages in the top right corner.
- Use double or at least 1.5 spacing and leave at least a 5cm left margin for comments: this is to allow your marker room to make comments and corrections.
- Staple the paper in the top left corner.
- While computer failure is always a possibility, computer trouble does not excuse the non-appearance of an essay. Make frequent backup copies of your files, and generate a hard copy as early as possible. Always keep a copy of your essay when you hand it in. Essays can go missing, and if the Department has no record of your submitting an assignment, you cannot be given a mark.

10.2 Electronic Submission

- For electronically-submitted essays and assignments, you may not be required to include a cover sheet. However you **must** ensure that your full name, the course code, the number of the assignment (for example, Essay Two) and the number of the question you are answering are clearly displayed at the top of the first page.
- Like hard-copy essays, electronically- submitted essays must be double- or 1.5-spaced, page-numbered and otherwise correctly formatted.

10.3 Word Limits

Write to the assigned word limit. Most markers will allow a margin of up to 10% words on either side of the limit without penalty, but essays significantly above or below the limit may be penalised (see your course outline or check with your marker for specific penalties). The point of word limits is

- to indicate the amount of work that your marker wishes you to do for a given assignment (hence the word length will often be proportional to the percentage of your final grade the essay represents)
- to ensure a "level playing field": everyone has the same amount of space and time in which to perform the task
- to ensure you cover sufficient ground and go into sufficient depth, while at the same time ensuring you write as concisely

and precisely as possible. Hence, you should carefully check your essay for repetition, flabby or unnecessarily wordy writing – but also for insufficient explanation of points.

10.4 Due Dates, Extensions and Penalties for Late Submission

- Essays must be submitted on or before the due date. If you need an extension, contact the tutor or lecturer who will be marking the essay as early as possible. Essay extensions may not be granted within 24 hours of the essay deadline.
- The grounds for an extension are normally limited to illness or crisis, and must usually be supported by a letter from a doctor, registered social worker, or counselor (at Student Health, for example). A heavy workload from other classes is not usually acceptable grounds for an extension. If you are not sure, contact your marker and explain the situation you are facing: he or she will be compassionate, but will not be a pushover!
- Essays received late without an extension may not be accepted. If they are, they
    - will not receive the same range or depth of feedback given to essays submitted on time.
    - will incur a part-grade penalty (i.e. from a B+ to a B) per day of lateness.

11. If You Have Significant Problems with Writing

The courses offered by the English Department are not designed to teach grammar and sentence structure: all students who enrol for our courses should be capable of writing formal, grammatically correct English sentences.

If you have significant problems with writing, especially with grammar and sentence structure, there are several options available. Keep in mind that to achieve any improvement **you will need to start identifying and working on your problems at a very early stage of your essay writing process**, not the week (or the day!) before the essay is due in.

- The University's Academic Skills Centre is a very valuable resource for the entire University community. It offers courses, of varying duration, throughout the academic year on topics such as grammar and sentence structure. For information on their courses and other services see their website at http://www.lps.canterbury.ac.nz/lsc/.

- Arrange a time to see your tutor or lecturer while you are in the process of writing your essay, or after you received your marked essay back. Tutors and lecturers have a great deal of experience in the processes and the problems of essay-writing, and even a short conversation can pay large dividends.

- Find a friend, family member (or if you can afford to, you could hire a private tutor) who can check through your work before you submit it and help you identify any problems with the writing. Just make sure that person’s grammar and writing skills are up to the standard required, or he or she may induce you to make further errors!

12. One Final Tip …

…: try and **enjoy** your essay-writing!

Although nobody finds the process easy, writing academic essays provides an interlocking range of challenges that will advance your thinking, extend your knowledge, and give your brain a health-enhancing and strengthening workout. Just remember that, as in the case of physical exercise, the best way to ensure that essay-writing is both beneficial and enjoyable is to allow **plenty of time for it!**