

English Literature Honors Style Sheet—Out-of-Class Essays

Use this style sheet as a checklist. **Proofread** your out-of-class essays carefully and do not make any of these mistakes. Be responsible and turn in your very best work.

1. **Follow directions!** You were given examples of a Works Cited page and internal citations in the essay directions. The course syllabus states that all out-of-class essays must be submitted in MLA format. Please be sure that your essay conforms to MLA guidelines. If you need further guidance, refer to the attached set-up instructions for MLA format, or view my website for an example.

An aside—In his freshman year of college, a CHS English teacher's son submitted a paper to his college professor and was docked 5% for incorrectly formatting one Internet source on his works cited page. His professor never went over MLA format. She simply stated in her syllabus that MLA format was required. This is the real world scenario you will be entering next year.

2. **Always support your analysis with quotes from the text.**

Is there a difference between a quote from the text and paraphrased information from the text? YES! Textual support is always stronger and more persuasive. Paraphrasing often leads to retelling which leads to plot summary instead of analysis. Always analyze the text and use direct quotes from the text to support your analysis. The correlation of analysis and relevant evidence from the text (quotes) demonstrates strong critical thinking skills. (Reference the Integrating Quotes reference guide which you were given.)

3. **Watch poor paragraph construction!** Literary analysis is inherently persuasive writing. Your goal is to persuade the reader that your analysis and interpretation of the text is correct. This strategy is the basic foundation of good writing—topic sentence, a combination of textual support (concrete detail/quote) and analysis (commentary), and a concluding sentence. At this level of writing, most body paragraphs will contain more than one quote from the text. EVERY body paragraph should be constructed as such. Every body paragraph should have a topic sentence which lets the reader know how that particular paragraph will support the thesis statement in the introductory paragraph. Every body paragraph must have a purpose. Every body paragraph should fully develop its support of the thesis statement

4. **Address the prompt with your thesis statement!** You MUST thoroughly address the prompt in the introductory paragraph. Literary analysis is not about the big surprise at the end. Your thesis must offer a clear viewpoint in the introductory paragraph and then be well-supported throughout the essay. After reading the introductory paragraph I (the reader) should have a clear idea of what position you are going to take **and** how you plan to prove that your position is indeed correct. **Highlight your thesis statement in yellow before you turn in your hard copy.**

5. **Eliminate the verb “show” from your writing.** “Show” is a weak verb. It is nondescript. We have discussed this verb in class. You want your writing to be precise. You want to demonstrate that you indeed command **sophisticated vocabulary skills**. The verb “show” also becomes quite repetitive in many students’ writing. (Ex. This shows that....) Are there any synonyms for the verb “shows?” *After contemplating exactly what it is you would like to say*, please consider using one of the following verbs.

demonstrates	exhibits	exemplifies	presents
illustrates	proffers	supports	submits
proves	manifests	offers	marks
affords	proclaims	supplies	discovers
typifies	enlightens	epitomizes	maintains
divulges	reveals	projects	unveils
parades	brandishes	disports	exposes
flashes	flaunts	indicates	conducts
guides	directs	establishes	determines
materializes	validates	authenticates	displays
illuminates	embodies	represents	personifies
symbolizes	mirrors	endorses	defends
bolsters	upholds	sustains	champions
advocates	relates		

6. **Demonstrate precision in your writing.** Students’ essays are often littered with phrases which began with “This.” When “this” stands alone as the subject of the sentence it is often imprecise. The question the reader asks is ***“This what??”***

WEAK--“**This** marks the first step Paul D. took in confronting his past experience.”

BETTER—“**This act** marks the first step Paul D. took in confronting his past experience.”

Eliminate the phrase “This shows that” from your writing completely! It is a sign of an unsophisticated writer.

WEAK--“This shows that even though she was set free, enslavement prompted her to.....”

BETTER--“Even though she was set free, enslavement prompted her to....”

Be direct in your writing. **Eliminate “This quote shows” and “This quote proves.”** State your analysis empirically. Using phrases like those discussed in Item #6 weakens your position. You want to sound academic, confident, and, ultimately, persuasive.

7. **You must be consistent with the use of “reader” and “audience.”** If you are analyzing a novel, short story, or poem, you use the term “reader.” If you are analyzing a play, you use the term “audience.” We will never analyze a movie in a formal essay.

8. **The vast majority of the time, punctuation marks are placed INSIDE quotation marks.**

EX. “Will I ever have an opportunity to meet him??”

The exception of course is punctuation with an internal citation—

The Friar’s lack of devotion is obvious by his belief that “It was not fitting with the dignity / Of his position, dealing with a scum / Of wretched lepers” (Chaucer 248 – 250).

9. **Do not use a colon after a verb or a preposition.** It is quite simply not grammatically correct.

10. **If your sentence ends in a preposition, it is often poorly constructed.** My high school English teacher taught me this strategy. A sentence which ends with “of” or “for” can often be reworded and will be much less awkward. When you proofread your essays, be on the lookout for sentences which end in prepositions. **REWORD THOSE SENTENCES**, so they no longer end in a preposition! Your writing will be less awkward and more precise.

11. **Use proper punctuation in compound and complex sentences.** If you do not, you fail to demonstrate a command of basic mechanics.

12. **PRONOUN ANTECEDANT AGREEMENT!** When you fail to demonstrate command of this basic grammatical concept, your writing is weakened. (singular—his, her, its, one’s) (plural—their)

“Morrison’s message is that enslavement negatively affects **one’s** ability to relate to **their** (*should be one’s*) identity.”

13. **Possessive nouns use apostrophes!** PLEASE—USE APOSTROPHES to indicate possession.

EX. Mary’s car NOT Marys car!

14. **Basic misuse of words**—affect / effect; loose / lose; their / there; to / too; its / it’s

Again, these basic grammatical concepts when used incorrectly will drastically undermine your credibility as a writer.

15. **Use consistent verb tense—PRESENT TENSE in analysis.**

16. **Use third person perspective in critical analysis.** Never use I, me, we, you, or us in formal critical analysis! Writing, specifically analytical writing, sounds more persuasive when written in third person—he, she, they, it, one, the reader.