

ESSAY GUIDELINES and English Literature Assignment Miscellany...

The following is intended to give you basic direction in essay writing for this class. It is important that you follow the main idea of what I have listed below.

Please note that Mrs. Muller's Late Policy is very strict. No work will be accepted after midnight Pacific Time on the day that it is due. Assignments are always given enough in advance that illness is not an acceptable excuse. Make sure you allow yourself enough time to complete each assignment in time!

BASIC ESSAY STRUCTURE:

Use the following as a "skeleton" upon which to build your argument or exposition.

Title of Essay

(This should not be the same as the piece you are writing about. For example, if you are writing about Beowulf, your essay should not be called Beowulf, unless you wrote the original work.)

- I. **Introductory Paragraph:** This should have an interesting beginning and taper down into your **thesis**, or the main idea you plan to explore in the essay. (For instance: "Beowulf can be considered a hero because he is generous, brave, and loyal to his king.")
- II. **Body Paragraphs:** Each body paragraph should have a clear topic sentence, several examples from the text and your commentary about them. Work on using good transitions from paragraph to paragraph. You generally have a MINIMUM of three body paragraphs in essays for this class.

Basic Paragraph Structure: This is a good basic way to ensure that you are using enough of the text and that you are giving enough of your opinion about it.

1st sentence: Topic sentence: This is like a mini-thesis statement. You should focus on one point of your thesis (remember? The one you have in your introduction? :) in the topic sentence. For instance: "Beowulf's heroism is revealed in his generosity to others."

2nd sentence: Concrete Detail (CD): This is a fact, quote, example, etc.
Basically, it is evidence from the text supporting your topic sentence.

3rd sentence: Commentary (CM): This is further explanation, connection or illumination of your CD. A good way to start is to use the phrase "this shows that." However, ONLY use this in your rough draft-- it is a "think starter", not a lovely phrase worth keeping in your final draft. If you eliminate it, your sentence will still make sense and also sound much better.

4th sentence: CM #2: This is even further explanation, connection, or illumination. I encourage you to go beyond two sentences of commentary, but you should start with at least two. You can start this thought with "furthermore" (which you can keep in your final draft here and there. I don't want to see 10 "furthermores" however! Be more creative.)

5th sentence: CD #2 (see sentence 2)

6th sentence: CM #1 (see sentence 3)

7th sentence: CM #2 (see sentence 4)

8th sentence: Concluding/transitional sentence: this ties up your ideas in a neat package and should also lead the reader into the next thought you plan to explore.

III. **Conclusion Paragraph:** This paragraph should briefly restate what you have revealed to us in an interesting manner.

WRITING TIPS:

1. Use your vocabulary. Oftentimes, your meaning can be more accurately conveyed with the proper choice of words. Instead of saying someone "walks", you could say he or she "saunters", "struts", or "shuffles". Each of these words paints a different picture. Ask yourself if there is a better way to say what you mean.
2. Support your statements. If you believe that the epic hero Beowulf represents Christ, use some support from the text to buttress your

belief. Avoid making blanket statements about the literature without using the text as a basis.

3. Avoid clichés when at all possible. They are often so overused that they become meaningless to the reader. Create your own descriptions.
4. Double-check your work for grammatical and spelling errors. Nothing more quickly detracts from well-expressed ideas than a paper fraught with misspellings and other such errors. If you are not a good speller or grammarian, have someone who is help you work on this problem.
5. Do not use “a lot”. This is overused and non-descriptive.
6. Use well-structured sentences, avoiding fragments and run-ons.
7. Use **Literary Present Tense**. Write as if the events in the story are occurring in the present. (“Beowulf fights fearlessly” rather than “Beowulf fought fearlessly”)
8. **PLEASE** make corrections on your essays when you get them back from me. Go through each comment and do your best to change the sentence or paragraph in order to rectify it. Also, write out each misspelled word five times. I spend much of my time grading papers and to think that you will miss out on the benefits that come from fixing your errors is depressing. Keep your teacher happy.
9. Plan ahead so that you have enough time to send in a well-written paper that has been proofread several times.
10. Do not plagiarize someone else’s work. Whether you “borrow” an entire essay, a few paragraphs, or even main ideas from someone else, it is still considered plagiarism and this is a despicable form of cheating. You will receive no credit for plagiarizing and your semester evaluation (which may be seen by colleges you are interested in attending) will include the fact that you cheated. If you are really struggling with an essay, you may email me for help. If you struggle with writing, make sure to give yourself enough time to contact me (or someone else who can help with writing).

ESSAY CORRECTIONS:

Oftentimes, I tend to abbreviate as I grade papers. Hopefully, this guide will help you decipher my comments.

LPT: Change to Literary Present Tense: “Dr. Faustus made a compact with the devil.”

Correct: “Dr. Faustus makes a compact with the devil.”

S-V: Subject/Verb Disagreement: “Many trials is ahead for Viola.”

Correct: “Many trials are ahead for Viola.”

WW: Wrong Word: “Their are five trees in our yard.”

Correct: “There are five trees in our yard.”

“I am defiantly interested in having some ice cream.”

Correct: “I am definitely interested in having some ice cream.”

****Please do not depend on spell check. It will not catch many errors. “Their” and “defiantly” are both legitimate words, but they are obviously the wrong words.*

=) : That’s funny. (Or interesting—basically, it made me smile when I read it.)

SP: Misspelled word.

R-O: Run-on sentence

FRAG: Fragmented (incomplete) sentence.

Adapted from a guide by Christy Hinrichs.