

Grading Guidelines

While these descriptions mention essays, the same applies for all out of class writing for this course.

- A paper: **An A essay is clear with rich content.** The organization is clear yet unobtrusive, and the paragraphs use rich, detailed examples and include explanations which clearly illustrate the writer's points. Transitions, both within and between paragraphs, are smooth, and the writer avoids proofreading errors. Sentence structures are varied, and the specific wording, descriptions and insightful commentary make you eager to reread the essay. In sum, you feel the writer is holding an intelligent, reasoned conversation with you.
- B paper: **In general, a B paper contains all the elements of a C essay, but uses more specific details or examples,** and explains them more clearly so that the reader occasionally forgets they are reading an essay. The reader seldom, if ever, has to ask "huh?" The introduction makes the reader want to read the rest of the essay, and the conclusion leaves the reader satisfied. The writer often varies sentences and uses specific wording, breaking away from the standard five or six paragraph mold, developing a single idea/division in more than one paragraph. The basics, such as formatting and proofreading, are handled competently, with a minimum of errors to impede the reader's understanding.
- C paper: **This is writing that gets the job done – and the way most students write.** The essay has a clear thesis and contains all components of the specific assignment (i.e. counter-argument and rebuttal in argumentative essays or the required number of words or sources). While the essay is organized, more work on transitions and clearer cues to the reader (i.e. topic sentences) are needed. Examples are presented, but not in sufficient detail to let the reader "see" exactly what the writer means, and explanations of them are sometimes perfunctory. Additionally, C essays often show signs of being rushed with some formatting and proofreading errors, though not enough to prevent the reader from understanding the argument. Note: you do not get a "C" just for handing in the essay (see first sentence below).
- D paper: **This does not mean that you haven't done any work; it means that the final draft needed further revision before it meets the standards of a "C" essay.** In general, these essays lack direction and/or have errors which prevent readers from understanding your thinking. Sometimes lacking a clear thesis, these essays have paragraphs (often missing topic sentences) that seem to wander and thus lack focus. Additionally, the essay may lack a central component of the assignment -- say, a specific counter-argument or insufficient sources. On a more basic level, the essay may have too many proofreading errors (If you make more than the maximum number of major errors for a given essay, you've earned a "D").
- F paper: **As in D papers, this does not mean that you haven't done any work, it means that the essay has serious problems** – missing research, pages, too many logic errors etc. – or exhibits a lack of understanding of the assignment. They could also be too short (be sure to meet the minimum word requirement) or too filled with grammatical errors to be understandable.

The above is adapted from Holt's handbook.

NOTE: Essays will be returned in a week to ten days. I will only bring them into class once. If you miss that class, you must come to my office to pick up your essay. It is your responsibility to remember to do so.

Breakdown of letter grades: A=4; A-=3.8; B+=3.5; B=3; B-=2.8; C+=2.5; C=2; C-=1.8; D+=1.5; D=1

A Note on Grading

The biggest surprise most students have with the difference between college and high school is the difference in the way their work is evaluated. Back in the early Jurassic period, when I was in high school, if you handed something in, you received a B for effort: if it was typed (remember, I used a stone typewriter), you received an A for going that extra mile.

The problem with this attitude is that in real life, effort doesn't count – results do. If you submit a poorly researched and worded report on the market for water widgets in Mongolia to the division supervisor of WasteYourMoneyOnPlasticThingAMajigsThatYouDon'tReallyNeed™ Inc. and tell her "I spent, like, fifteen hours on this, so it's like, perfect," she will show you the door. This is her way of saying "I evaluate your ideas and their communication to others – not your effort."

tutor (see below). Finally, look around the classroom: your classmates can be your best source of criticism. They are familiar with the material, are familiar with my standards, and are familiar with you. Study groups? Peer review groups? Sounds like a good idea to me.

Be sure to study the comments I make throughout your paragraphs/essay very closely. Before beginning a new essay, look back over these comments, and be sure to continue doing what worked, and to focus on and improve what didn't. Remember that one of the best ways to improve your writing is to sit with me both before and after your essay is graded. This gives us a chance to see your writing "in action," and either address the rough spots in your prose or organization, or discuss ways to avoid future problems.

If you know already that proofreading problems plague your prose, be sure to set up regular appointments with the college's writing tutor. If you notice after your first or second essay that you're having problems with proofreading, set up regular appointments with one of the college's writing tutor. By now you're probably wondering "Okay, where DO I find this tutor?" Check in R144, The Writing Center, and sign up.

Dr. Bordelon's Glossary of Writing Terms (with a few literary terms thrown in for good measure)

Bold words in definitions means a cross-reference (check in glossary for the definition of that word).

Annotate: To mark up, comment on, or underline writing. In the margins of your book you need to ask questions of the writer, summarize a paragraph with a key word, note similarities in word choice, and in general, take notes. This is your way of communicating with a writer (even dead ones), and making sure you understand what is written. It also helps to prepare you for in-class discussions. Do this with a pen or pencil – hi-lighters prevent you from actually talking back to the text (ever try writing with one of those yellow markers?). Another hint, with longer works, is to use an index card as a bookmark and note page numbers of important quotes or descriptions.

Audience: Remember, you're writing for somebody else – whoever is reading your work can't get inside of your head or ask you "Uh, what do you mean right here?" You have to make your thinking clear to your reader, who is ignorant of what you're trying to say, is always hungry for more detail, and who (in my case) has high expectations.

Argument: A particular point or belief you are trying to prove. This works on two levels: 1) you have the argument for an entire essay (**thesis**): Rowlandson's religious views color the way she views life in the *Narrative*; 2) you have an argument for an individual paragraph (**topic sentence**): Another religious aspect of Rowlandson's *Narrative* is her depiction of Native Americans.

Body Paragraphs: The individual paragraphs that make up the argument or provide the information contained in your **essay**. Each paragraph is focused on a single idea (and usually a focus word/s to explain what you will be saying about that idea), stated in a **topic sentence**. In turn, each paragraph supports, explains, or proves your **thesis**. When typed, a paragraph should roughly cover 1/3 to 1/2 of a page. Any more, and the reader probably needs a break; any less, and the reader isn't satisfied. This, of course, overlooks the occasional one sentence zinger paragraph.

Sample paragraph format: (see **Body Paragraph in syllabus for a more detailed example of a paragraph set-up**)

- 1) A main point stated in one sentence (make it an argument/statement – Another religious aspect of Rowlandson's *Narrative* is her depiction of Native Americans – a claim that needs to be backed up. I'll call this a **topic sentence**).
- 2) An definition/**explanation** of any general words in your main point. In this case, what do you mean by a "religious"? What kind of religion?
- 3) **Examples** or details that support your point (use descriptions of characters or setting, quotes from the literary work, commentary by literary critics, etc.). Remember that instead of just sticking in a quote, you need to provide a **context** so the reader can understand – even before they read the quote – its purpose in the paragraph. Ex. Throughout the work, Rowlandson refers to the Native Americans in terms that would demonize them, separating them from her Christian readers. She calls Native Americans "hell hounds" (311). Taking this satanic imagery further she describes their camp as having "a lively resemblance of hell" (311).

- 4) The reader cannot read your mind: after each quote, you have to tell him or her exactly what you want it to prove/show. Ask the following question in your head "how does this example prove my point?" and "why is this quote important in this paragraph?" and then it answer in your essay. This is where you prove your argument. As a sentence starter, try "This" or a restatement of your example (ex. This identification of her captors with the devil reflects her Puritan beliefs. For her and other Puritans, because the Native Americans are pagans, they are outside of god's grace and are thus actively opposed to Christians. Instead of seeing their humanity - even when confronted with acts of kindness at the hands of her captors - she refuses to ascribe their actions to their own volition. Falling back on her Puritan beliefs, she believes that such kindness is the result of "the wonderful power and goodness of God" (321).
- 5) A sentence or two to sum up. This negative portrayal of Native Americans, while of course connected to being kidnapped by them, is grounded in a deep seated religious belief that the Puritans are closer to the Christian god, and everyone else is on an express to hell.

Adapted from **Rules of Thumb**

Citation: Used to let reader know you have used an outside source. In this class, we'll be using the **MLA Citation** method.

Commas: Not when you pause, and not when the sentence is going on too long. Actually, there are four times when you need a comma: 1) with an introductory phrase; 2) with a list; 3) before a conjunction and between two **independent clauses**; and 4) with a interruption or insertion (dependent clauses). See your grammar text for more information.

Conclusion: The last paragraph of your essay. You can ask yourself the question "What's it all mean?" or bring up a point broached in your **introduction**, or . . . something else.

Context: This serves two purposes: 1) it sets up your point/argument by telling the reader why you're bringing up a particular source or quote, and 2) it gives the reader information to help identify the speaker or place the speaker or example in the given work. For example, if using a quote from Rowlandson's captivity narrative you might say Throughout the work, Rowlandson refers to the Native Americans in terms that would demonize them, separating them from her Christian readers. She calls Native Americans "hell hounds" (311). Taking this satanic imagery further she describes their camp as having "a lively resemblance of hell" (311). Context helps readers 1) by making the reader think "Oh yeah, now I remember that part" and 2) by letting readers better understand (and thus agree with) your argument by framing it in a manner so they can understand it. By setting up your example so clearly, your argument flows logically from your example and explanation leaving the reader with a satisfied "Ahhh" as opposed to a befuddled "huh?"

Cues: No, not sticks used in playing pool, but the way writers direct readers through their work. For instance, a **thesis** and **division statement** are cues writers use to tell their readers "This is what my essay will be about." A **topic sentence** is a cue that tells readers "This is what this paragraph will be about," and a transition tells readers "Okay, I'm moving from this topic to that topic."

Dependent Clause: A phrase which cannot stand by itself. Ex. *The dog, which had sharp teeth, was bit by the postman.* The italicized phrase "which had sharp teeth," needs to be set off from the independent clause with **commas**. See #4 in **Commas**.

Detail: It's your job to supply specific quotes, descriptions of characters, or settings, and other information from the work you are discussing to "show" them what you are talking about. You must supply the reader with the **evidence** that shaped your understanding of the story so that he or she can say to themselves "Yeah, I kinda' see that too" - as opposed to "Huh?" Remember, the reader is a hungry beast, and it is difficult to satisfy his or her desire to know, so be specific. After supplying details, remember to add **explanations**.

Direct Quote: Using the exact wording from your source: no words can be taken out (unless you use ellipsis dots), and no words can be added (unless you put brackets [] around them). You denote where the quote begins and ends with quotation marks. **NOTE: YOU MUST CITE DIRECT QUOTES AND USE AN INTRODUCTORY PHRASE.**

Division Statement: A phrase, usually attached to the **thesis**, but sometimes separate, which sets out the different parts/**arguments**/reasons which prove the **thesis** of your essay. Think of it as a road map to the reader so they can see what's coming. Each of your **body paragraphs** needs to be accounted for in your division statement. (See also "Thesis Statements").

In the sample **thesis statement** below, the **division statement** is italicized.

Rowlandson illustrates her Puritan heritage *in her depiction of Native Americans, belief that her punishment is deserved, and providential outlook.*

Below are **topic sentences** based on the **division statement** above. Note how they follow the order established in the **division statement**:

1. Early in the narrative, Native Americans are described in a manner that exposes Rowlandson's Puritanism.
2. In typical Puritan fashion, Rowlandson welcomes the punishment of being kidnapped.
3. Connected to this belief that her punishment is deserved is the providential outlook that colors her reaction to every event.

Essay: An essay is a focused and organized presentation of your thinking on a particular topic – with an emphasis on the word focus. It is not everything you know or feel about a topic dumped into a collection of paragraphs, but a body of writing with a clear direction, a direction readily apparent to the reader and which logically proceeds from one part to the next. It usually consists of an **introduction, thesis/division statement, body paragraphs,** and a **conclusion.**

The main difference between academic essays and essays for general readership (such as articles in magazines) is audience. In academic writing, you communicate your thinking by following some basic conventions (**introduction, thesis statement,** etc.) so that your primary reader, usually a tired, overworked professor, can quickly grasp your understanding of, or position on, a specific topic. When writing for general readers, more emphasis is placed on style; unlike the professor, these readers don't have to read the essay: the writer has to make them want to read it – and it has to be good enough to persuade readers to shell out the bucks to do so. The challenge in writing for college lies in combining the two: to follow the conventions without sounding, well, academic. As the sample essay included in this packet show, it is possible to stick to a "pattern," yet retain an individual and interesting voice: it just takes some effort.

Evidence: In essays on literature, this usually consists of **direct quotes** from the **primary source** which prove/illustrate the argument you are making. **Evidence** could also be quotes or summaries from **secondary sources.** These are all used to show the reader how you reached your opinion (but see **explanation** below for the second half of this dynamic duo).

Explanation: By answering the "why," "how," and "what" of your **evidence, explanations** prove your **argument.** As you draft and revise each paragraph, literally ask yourself the following questions each time you offer **evidence:** "How does this prove the **focus** of this paragraph?" or "Why should the reader know this?" or "What does this prove?" **Details, evidence,** and sources are mute: you must give them a voice by telling the reader exactly how and why they prove your point. Remember, the reader is a duh-head: he or she cannot understand what you are saying – ya' gotta make clear. To be blunt, try adding at least two complete sentences of explanation. See #4 in **body paragraphs.**

Focus Word/s: For me, a word or phrase in the **topic sentence** of a **body paragraph** that gives the paragraph a direction – and refers back to a **division.** Ex. Early in the narrative, Native Americans are described in a manner that exposes Rowlandson's Puritanism. In this topic sentence, the focus words are "described" and "exposes Rowlandson's Puritanism." They correspond with division 1 in the following thesis: Rowlandson illustrates her Puritan heritage (1) in her depiction of Native Americans, (2) belief that her punishment is deserved, and (3) providential outlook. Thus, the **examples and explanation** will concentrate on proving this. A clear focus lends a direction and helps you shape your paragraph.

Format: The physical way your essay looks on the page. I use the MLA format, which is standard for courses in the Humanities. Luckily, this is a no-brainer. Just match the sample essay and you'll have no problems. Pay attention to spacing, placement of page number, and works cited page. Note: those who use Word or Works do not follow the "Report" template: use your brain and follow the sample essay.

Fragment: A sentence that doesn't complete a thought – or more formally, lacks a subject and verb. See your grammar text for more information.

Independent Clause: A sentence, or part of a sentence, that can stand on its own. Ex. The dog, which had sharp teeth, was bit by the postman. The independent clause is The dog was bit by the postman.

Introduction: Use this paragraph to get your reader interested, or "hooked," on your topic – and thus the first paragraph in an **essay.** Beware of the boring start. Usually, your thesis and division statement are in the introduction (generally the last sentence of introduction), but are not *the* introduction. One good technique is to discuss in

general the topic of your essay. For example, in an essay about Sammy as a realistic hero, you can discuss American's typical ideas of heroes, and then contrast them with Sammy.

Introductory Phrase: In my class, a short phrase which sets up a **direct quotation** (more generally, any short **dependent clause** used at the beginning of a sentence). You should provide a **context** for your quote by letting the reader know who wrote or said it. Ex. As the critic Robert Fitzgerald argues "O'Connor's work is always infused with a sense of God's grace" (23).

MLA documentation: The Modern Language Association, a professional organization that publishes guidelines on academic publishing in the humanities, has set out a method for documenting research. It consists of two parts: **parenthetical citations** and **works cited entries**. Since we're a course in the humanities, we'll be using this method of documentation.

Organization: The structure of your **essay**. Your organization includes your **thesis, division statement, and topic sentences**. If they all connect, your essay is well organized; if the order of your divisions does not match the order of your paragraphs, or if the reader cannot follow the logic of your argument, then you need to work on **revision**.

Outline: A breakdown of the different parts of your **essay**. This doesn't have to be a formal, roman numeral job; it could be as simple as a list of phrases/ideas that set up your ideas/divisions for each paragraph. Interestingly, they can often be used after you've written your rough draft (I use both – and find that the ones I use after I've written a rough draft are the ones I usually stick with).

Paraphrase: Taking each word of your source, and finding a synonym for it. There can be no words from the original source in your paraphrase. **NOTE: THIS MUST INCLUDE A CITATION.**

Parenthetical Documentation/Citation (Or In-text Citation): In **MLA documentation**, this consists of two parts: the author's last name and the page number where the information cited was taken from: it is how the reader knows you are using a source, or research. If using a direct quote, the author's name must be included in an **introductory phrase** with only the page number in the parenthesis: Ex. As the critic Robert Fitzgerald argues "O'Connor's work is always infused with a sense of God's grace" (23). Note that there is no p. or page in the parenthesis, that the author's name isn't repeated in the parenthesis, and that the punctuation goes to the right of the parenthesis.

If summarized or paraphrased, you could use an **introductory phrase**, or if not, the author's name in the parenthesis. In any event, the page number/s denoting where the source is located **source** must be included in the parenthesis.

Plagiarism: Taking any words or ideas from another writer or person and either a) not putting the wording you copied from the **source** in quotation marks; and/or b) not using a **citation** to let the reader know who you received the wording or other information (summary, paraphrase, or idea/s) from. This will result in a failing grade. If you have a question about a **source**, bring it and your essay in so we can review it together. Be sure to check and follow the definitions **Direct Quote, Paraphrase, and Summary**.

Pre-writing: Instead of staring at a blank piece of paper waiting for that perfect first sentence to drop from the heavens to your head, jot down notes, brainstorm, make lists, or just write for 10 minutes without stopping to get started. This technique helps you get started – and comes in handy for revision as well.

Primary Source: The actual literary text you are writing about. In an essay on John Updike's "A&P," the primary source would be "A&P." In an essay on *Hamlet*, the primary source would be *Hamlet*. See also **Secondary Source**.

Proofreading: A different way of reading an essay where you concentrate on clarifying wording and punctuation. After you're finished **revising** your essay, you go through the essay slowly, ideally, with someone else reading along on another copy, and question **EVERYTHING**. Do I need that comma? Do I need to add a comma here? Did I introduce that source correctly? Couldn't I use a more specific word here. Get used to reading your work as a workbook exercise, not as something you've written -- in other words, *actively look for and make changes*. Two hints: slowly read essay out loud, listening for confusing or tangled wording, and read essay from the last sentence to the first.

Reasons: These are the **arguments** used to prove the validity of your **thesis**. Try to develop as many different reasons as you can (ask yourself "why is my main focus valid?"), and then choose the ones which you feel will best prove your point. You should **revise** and refine these as you write your essay.

Research: Articles or other material on the particular story or author from literary journals, letters or journals which the author wrote, historical documents or other authoritative **sources** that are used to support your **argument**. Often you use expert opinion to show how your **arguments** are valid, or you may argue with someone's beliefs. The key in most essays is to avoid using long quotes or letting the research overwhelm your essay: remember, you, as the writer of the paper, need to determine what helps your overall argument, and what just sounds good. See **source**.

Revision: To look at your writing not as the person that wrote it, but as a reader who feels differently than you on

any given topic. A good place to start revising is by deleting as much as you can. While this strikes terror in beginning writers' hearts ("It took me forever to come up with this in the first place!"), it is essential for good writing. Almost all drafts have paragraphs and sentences that aren't detailed or don't support the thesis. It's a *very* good sign if you cut out large sections of your prose: it shows that you now know what you want to say. In short, revision entails looking at the entire work and determining what helps and what doesn't – and being brutally honest about what doesn't. As a student once told me, "All I'm keeping is the name at the top of the page."

After removing the "dead wood," you can work on communicating your thoughts more effectively. This often entails adding descriptions, facts, comparisons, or stories to make your point (**evidence**), and then **explaining**, in two or three different ways, exactly how these descriptions, facts, etc. prove that point. Remember, the **evidence** makes perfect sense to you – but not to the reader who looks at things differently than you do. In any case, make changes until you're sure the reader says "Oh, NOW I see what you mean."

Run-on: Two **independent clauses** in one sentence. These need to be separated with a period, semi-colon, comma and conjunction, or rewritten. See your grammar text for more information.

Source: An individual piece of **research** used in your essay. This could be anything from an article by a literary scholar to an interview with an author.

Secondary Source: In literature, this refers to letters, notes, or journals from the author, essays or books by critics, historical documents, etc., which are used when writing a research paper to support your ideas. The **primary source** would be the work (*The Scarlet Letter*, "Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God," "Calamus," etc.) itself.

Summary: Taking the general idea or statement from a source using only your own words. **NOTE: THIS MUST BE CITED.**

Thesis Statement: The controlling idea of an **essay** stated in one sentence, usually the last sentence in the **introduction**. See **division statement** for example. (See also "Thesis Statements")

Topic Sentence: The controlling idea of a paragraph. Usually phrased as a statement or claim that needs to be proved, it is related to and helps prove the thesis. Often uses a synonym of one of the divisions from the **division statement** to **cue** readers that a particular division is being discussed. See **division statement** for example.

Transitions: Words or phrases used within and between **body paragraphs** that show readers you are changing direction or topic. For paragraphs, a good technique is to mention the topic from the previous paragraph in the topic sentence of the new paragraph.

Ex. topic sentence with transition:

Connected to this belief that Rowlandson's punishment is deserved is the providential outlook that colors her reaction to every event.

In this example, the previous paragraph was punishment being deserved. The new paragraph will focus on her providential outlook.

Working Bibliography: An ongoing list of possible **sources** gleaned from indexes and computer databases. Usually, out of four items, you'll find one good **source**.

Works Cited Entry: A notation, following MLA format, of a particular **source**. These are located on the **works cited page**. This is detail work: you must follow the guidelines exactly, paying particular attention to the placement and order of dates, commas and periods. Luckily, this is a one time deal: do it right and do it once. I have several examples of commonly used sources in this packet: I expect you to follow them (see "Citing Sources" **Error! Bookmark not defined.**) for many specific examples).

Works Cited Page: An alphabetized arrangement (in MLA format) of all the **sources** actually used in a particular essay located on a separate page at the end of that essay. Follow sample essay and/or textbook for formatting instructions, and be sure to follow the MLA Works Cited entry format.