

WRITING ABOUT LITERATURE

THE WRITE ADVICE

SPECIAL EDITION V

UNIVERSITY OF WEST FLORIDA'S WRITING LAB

WWW.UWF.EDU/WRITELAB

Italicize This!

By Mamie Webb Hixon
Writing Lab Director

Book Titles	<i>The Prentice Hall Anthology of African-American Literature</i> <i>The Heaven of Mercury</i>
Movies	<i>A Beautiful Mind</i>
Plays	<i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i>
TV Programs	<i>Law & Order</i>
Musicals	<i>The Lion King</i>
Albums/CDs	<i>The Songs of Life</i>
Newspapers	<i>The New York Times</i>
Magazines	<i>Good Housekeeping</i>
Paintings	<i>The Mona Lisa</i>
Sculptures	<i>David</i>
Ships	<i>The Titanic</i>
Particular Aircraft	<i>The Hindenburg</i> <i>Challenger</i>

(Particular aircraft, not makes or types such as Piper or Boeing 757)

A word is dead
when it is said
some say
I say
It just begins to live
That day

Emily Dickinson

Italics are also used to identify foreign words or phrases that have not become fully anglicized/naturalized, that is, adapted to English usage without alteration. The problem lies in determining which words and phrases have become anglicized. Most handbooks recommend that you consult a dictionary if in doubt. *The Chicago Manual of Style (CMS)* states that "standardization relies on whether the word or phrase has made its way into a standard English dictionary. Such words and phrases may be regarded as having been adopted into English and as therefore not needing to be italicized [sic]. The adoption, however, does not mean that the item has necessarily become familiar to all. Familiarity is relative.... Many words that have long resided in standard English dictionaries are unfamiliar to most of us, and that [fact] has not been a reason to italicize them." *CMS* continues by stating that "the decision [to italicize a foreign word or phrase] might be based on a blend of considerations—familiarity, inclusion in a dictionary, and sympathy with the reader" (211-212).

Some common foreign words, phrases and expressions which have become anglicized are as follows:

cum laude	ad hoc committee	bon voyage
alumna	hacienda	laissez faire
genre	karate	de facto
double entendre	cliché	ex officio

There is no need to underline/italicize these words in a text.

Novels, Prose, and Poetry, Oh My!

Writing About Literature
A Note from the Editor
Chris Yow

You're a freshman or a sophomore in your first real lit class (or a junior, senior, or grad who's still struggling), and your instructor wants you to write about something you've read. Never mind that you have no idea what the work is trying to say, what could you possibly have to say about it? You know nothing about the era it was written in; you aren't sure you have a firm grasp on how economics and gender relate to each other; you can't see how a scarlet "A" can mean "art"; you thought Blake wrote just poems; you firmly believe (despite your own grammatical insecurities) that Lowry and Joyce could use some pointers; you can't even pronounce Middle English; and despite your instructor's insistence to the contrary, Hurston, Twain, and Shakespeare really are foreign languages. Somehow, that career in rocket science isn't looking quite so daunting.

First of all—relax. Take a deep breath and pick up a pen and your text, not a piece of paper. Good writing comes from good reading, and to read well, you need to *write on* what you're reading. The academic word for this activity is "marginalia," so you can feel smart about it. **Write questions and comments** on anything that disturbs, confuses, or intrigues you in the text. Mark words that you don't understand and *look them up*. Then **re-read** and write some more. Second—open your mouth in class. **Discuss with your instructor and your classmates** the things you've written in your marginalia. Don't think you have to sound brilliant; you don't. And **don't be afraid to ask** a stupid question; there's no such thing. Of course, **take good notes in class** and always, always expand your marginalia when your instructor points out key lines or passages. By now you should be getting a better grasp on comprehending the work you're reading and on some of the issues that can be pulled from it. Third—go **buy Prentice Hall's Pocket Guide to Writing about Literature** by Edward A. Shannon and read it and use it. It's an invaluable source for the beginning and advanced student trying to write about literature. Fourth—**write early**. Give yourself time to let your printer or computer have a migraine, time to make some sloppy drafts, time to make revisions, and time to have your instructor or an experienced reader give you suggestions. Fifth—**revise** some more, edit for surface errors, cross your fingers, and turn your paper in. And when you get it back, no matter what the grade is, *read* your instructor's comments and *log* them into your brain for future writing endeavors. The instructor hasn't written the comments just to defend the grade he or she has given you.

As a tool to help you in this process, this special edition of *The Write Advice* includes some articles, pointers, and style guidelines to help you navigate your way through some of the pitfalls, danger zones, and headaches of writing about literature. **As always, the Writing Lab is available for paper readings, and you can call or email our Grammar Hotline if you can't figure out how to do a citation, where a question mark goes at the end of a quotation, or how to do anything else related to written or spoken English.** So use your resources and common sense, and good luck. And forget about contemplating changing your major to something less risky and more concrete like neurosurgery or nuclear physics.

Those who write clearly have readers; those who write obscurely have commentators.

Anonymous

Plague Words and Phrases

by Charles Darling, Professor of English, Capital Community College, Hartford, CT
www.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar

Avoid problems created by these words or phrases:

- And also** This construction is often redundant.
- And/or** Outside of the legal world, most of the time this construction is used, it is neither necessary nor logical. Try using one word or the other.
- As to whether** The single word *whether* will suffice.
- Basically, essentially, totally** These words seldom add anything useful to a sentence. Try the sentence without them, and, almost always, you will see the sentence improve.
- Being that or being as** These words are a nonstandard substitute for *because*. *Being that* Because I was the youngest child, I always wore hand-me-downs.
- Considered to be** Eliminate the *to be* and, unless it's important who's doing the considering, try to eliminate the entire phrase.
- Due to the fact that** Using this phrase is a sure sign that your sentence is in trouble. Did you mean *because*? *Due to* is acceptable after a linking verb (The team's failure was due to illness among the stars.); otherwise, avoid it.
- Each and every** One or the other, but not both.
- Equally as** Something can be *equally important* or *as important as*, but not *equally as important*.
- Etc.** This abbreviation often suggests a kind of laziness. It might be better to provide one more example, thereby suggesting that you could have written more, but chose not to.
- He/she** is a convention created to avoid gender bias in writing, but it doesn't work very well, and it becomes downright obtrusive if it appears often. Use *he* or *she* or pluralize (where appropriate) so you can avoid the problem of the gender-specific pronoun altogether.
- Firstly, secondly, thirdly**, etc. Number things with *first, second, third*, etc. and not with these adverbial forms.
- Got** Many writers regard *got* as an ugly word, and they have a point. If you can avoid it in writing, do so. I ~~have got to~~ *must* begin studying right away. I have ~~got~~ two pairs of sneakers.
- Had ought or hadn't ought.** Eliminate the auxiliary *had*. You ~~hadn't~~ ought not to pester your sister that way.
- Interesting** One of the least interesting words in English, the word you use to describe an ugly baby. If you *show* us why something is interesting, you're doing your job.
- In terms of** See if you can eliminate this phrase.
- Irregardless** No one word will get you in trouble with the boss faster than this one.
- Kind of or sort of.** These are OK in informal situations, but in formal academic prose, substitute *somewhat, rather* or *slightly*. We were *kind of* rather pleased with the results.
- Literally** This word might be confused with *literarily*, a seldom-used adverb relating to authors or scholars and their various professions. Usually, though, if you say it's "literally a jungle out there," you probably mean *figuratively*, but you're probably better off without either word.
- Lots or lots of** In academic prose, avoid these colloquialisms when you can use *many* or *much*. Remember, too, that **a lot of** requires three words: "He spent *a lot of* money" (not *lot of*).
- Just** Use only when you need it, as in *just* the right amount.
- Nature** See if you can get rid of this word. Movies of a violent nature are probably just violent movies.
- Necessitate** It's hard to imagine a situation that would necessitate the use of this word.
- Of** Don't write would **of**, should **of**, could **of** when you mean would **have**, should **have**, could **have**.
- On account of** Use *because* instead.
- Only** Look out for placement. Don't write "He *only* kicked that ball ten yards" when you mean "He *kicked* that ball *only* ten yards."
- Orientate** The new students become *oriented*, not orientated. The same thing applies to **administrate** – we *administer* a project.
- Per** Use *according to* instead. We did it *per* your instructions? Naah. (This word is used frequently in legal language and in technical specifications, where it seems to be necessary and acceptable.)
- Plus** Don't use this word as a conjunction. Use *and* instead.
- Point in time** Forget it! *At this time* or *at this point* or *now* will do the job.
- Previous** as in "our previous discussion." Use *earlier* or nothing at all.
- So as to** Usually, a simple *to* will do.
- Suppose to, use to.** The hard "d" sound in *supposed to* and *used to* disappears in pronunciation, but it shouldn't disappear in spelling. "We *used to* do that" or "We were *supposed to* do it this way."
- The reason why is because.** *Deja vu* all over again!
- Thru** This nonstandard spelling of *through* should not be used in academic prose.
- Til** Don't use this word instead of *until* or *till*, even in bad poetry.
- Try and** Don't try and do something. Try to do something.
- Thusly** Use *thus* or *therefore* instead.
- Utilize** Don't use this word where *use* would suffice. (Same goes for *utilization*.)
- Very, really, quite (and other intensifiers)** Like *basically*, these words seldom add anything useful. Try the sentence without them and see if it improves.

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Introductory Verbs for Quotations

by Carol Rose

When you're incorporating quoted material into your text from another source, try to get away from the stereotyped verbs *says, writes, thinks, or feels*.

The citation leading up to a quotation represents an important link between your thoughts and those of your source. The *introductory verb* can tell your reader something about your reasons for presenting the quotation and its context in the work that you're taking it from. Try these verbs below to create some new and interesting possibilities:

acknowledges	concedes	endorses	points out
adds	confirms	establishes	proposes
admits	contends	explains	reasons
agrees	continues	finds	refutes
argues	declares	grants	responds
asserts	denies	implies	states
believes	disagrees	insists	suggests
claims	disputes	maintains	
compares	emphasizes	notes	

The following are examples of ways to vary introductory verbs:

In the words of Herbert Terrace, "..."

As Flora Davis has noted, "..."

The Gardners, Whashoe's trainers, point out that "..."

"..." claims Noam Chomsky.

Psychologist H. S. Terrace offers an odd argument for this view: "..."

Terrace answers these objections with the following analysis: "..."

Verbs that suggest you *agree* with your source include the following:

notes	points out	suggests	has discovered
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Verbs that suggest you are *neutral* or that you *disagree* with your source include the following:

alleges	claims	contends	argues
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Judy Young's Style Sheet

Adapted from Dr. Mary Lowe-Evans' Stylistic Pointers

1. Start early. Finish a **rough draft** early. Allow time to test your product on an educated reader who can tell you what's confusing, missing, or just plain wrong.
2. Anchor your arguments and assumptions in the text you are critiquing; that is, use quotation and paraphrase from the text as **evidence** to support your **claims**.
3. The first time you mention a critic's or author's work, give his or her **full name and the full title of the work**; subsequently, use the critic's or author's last name only and possibly a shortened title if you are referring to more than one work by the same author.
4. Use an **appropriate verb** to introduce a quotation. Here are a few possibilities: asserts, argues, contends, points out, observes, notes, insists, questions, denies, claims. Seldom does a critic, an author, or even a character simply "say" or "state" anything.
5. Have your **grammar handbook, dictionary, thesaurus**, and this style sheet handy as you edit and revise. There's no need to constantly check these resources while you're drafting, but they should all be involved in your revision process.
6. For recounting or describing events or characters in a work of fiction, use **present tense**.
7. **Avoid using vague words** and phrases such as "many" or "good." Be specific.
8. Avoid using **pronouns** such as "this," "that," "these," "which," or "those" without adding a noun.
9. Avoid using the **passive voice**.
10. Avoid using present progressive tense: "Joyce is suggesting that . . ."
11. Do not use **second person pronouns**, except when quoting.
12. Use **first person pronouns** sparingly.
13. Make sure you lead your reader from one idea to another by way of strategically placed **transitional words, sentences, or paragraphs**. Your reader should read carefully everything you put on the page, but she can't read your mind.
14. From time to time, remind your reader of how a particular point you are making relates back to and advances your thesis.
15. Collapse prepositional phrases into adjectives and adverbs. For example, prefer "the green-haired creature" to "the creature with green hair."
16. Do not use the same descriptive term more than twice on a page and rarely (usually for effect) in adjoining sentences.
17. **Combine short, choppy sentences** into longer, more sophisticated sentences by using subordinate clauses. Choppy: "Sir Arthur Conan Doyle believed that the fairy photographs were genuine. He was the same author who had created the ultra-logical detective, Sherlock Holmes. Revised: "Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the same author who had created the ultra-logical detective character, Sherlock Holmes, believed that the fairy photographs were genuine."
18. Revise your work. **Revise** again. **Edit** for errors. Take a long last look. Then turn it in.

YOU CAN QUOTE ME ON THIS!

By Mamie Webb Hixon
Writing Lab Director

Use quotation marks to set off the following:

Titles of Poems	"The Road Not Taken"
Titles of Newspaper/Magazine Articles	"The Numbing of the American Mind"
Chapters in a Book	"Understanding Curriculum and Instruction"
Titles of Essays	"Friends, Good Friends, and Such Good Friends"
Titles of Songs	"Imagine"
Episodes of a TV/Radio Program	"You Can't Say This Hasn't Been Fabulous"
Titles of Speeches	"I Have a Dream"
Dialogue	"Hey, man!" Lee yelled. "You're getting old."
	"Growing old is mandatory; growing up is optional," Basil quipped.
Intentional Slang	The fans exchanged hugs, handshakes, and "high-fives" with every passer-by.
Words Used for Emphasis	Former "back-door-Americans" are now congressmen.
Words Used in a Special Sense	A good writer is a "good reader."
Words Used as Words	The staff was careful to draw the distinction between "strategic" and "tactical."
Coined Words	FBI field offices had been "tasked" to increase surveillance.

QUOTATION MARKS WITH OTHER PUNCTUATION MARKS

Place the following punctuation marks inside closing quotation marks:
COMMAS
PERIODS

Place the following punctuation marks outside closing quotation marks:
SEMICOLONS
COLONS

The Literary Critic's 10 Commandments of Formal Writing

by Chris Yow

1. Thou shall not steal other writers' words, thoughts, or ideas by not correctly citing sources.
2. Thou shall not splice two sentences with commas, dangle modifiers, use restrictive pronouns vaguely, or perform any other egregious acts of violence against grammar.
3. Thou shall not use clichés; unidiomatic expressions; or lofty, ambiguous, confusing language.
4. Thou shall not use quotations at the beginning or end of paragraphs or in introductions or conclusions.
5. Thou shall not ask the reader questions.
6. Thou shan't use contractions.
7. Thou shall not use *you, I, or we*.
8. Thou shall not consort with weak thesis statements, weak topic sentences, or passive voice constructions.
9. Thou shall not use metapunctuation: too many semicolons, colons, dashes, or parentheses.
10. Thou shall not use the *MLA Handbook* in vain.

OFF THE SHELF OFF THE SHELF OFF THE SHELF OFF THE SHELF

OFF THE SHELF

From the UWF Argo Bookworms' Campus-wide Suggested Reading List

A Lesson Before Dying by Ernest Gaines
American Nomads by Richards Grant
Angels and Demons by Dan Brown
Black, White, and Jewish by Rebecca Walker
Bringing Down the House: The Inside Story of Six M.I.T. Students Who Took Vegas for Millions by Ben Mezrich
Chasing the Sea: Lost Among the Ghosts of Empire in Central Asia by Tom Bissell
Cold Mountain by Charles Frazier
Death Comes for the Archbishop by Willa Cather
Dune by Frank Herbert
Empire Falls by Richard Russo
Five People You Meet in Heaven by Mitch Albom
Florida: A Land Remembered by Patrick D. Smith
From Good to Great by James Collins
House of Sand and Fog by Andre Dubus
Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison
Ishmael by Daniel Quinn
Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë
Life of Pi by Yann Martel
Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game by Michael Lewis
Mordocai: An Early American Family by Emily Bingham
Oaxaca Journal by Oliver Sacks
One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel Garcia Marquez
Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen
Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books by Azar Nafisi
Seabiscuit by Laura Hillenbrand
Secret Life of Bees by Sue Monk Kidd
The Big Sleep by Raymond Chandler
The Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown
The Devil in the White City: Murder, Magic, and Madness at the Fair that Changed America by Erik Larson
The Emperor of Ocean Park by Stephen L. Carter
The Human Stain by Philip Roth
The Music Lesson by K. Weber
The One True Ocean by Sarah Beth Martin
The Poisonwood Bible by Barbara Kingsolver
The Rise of the Creative Class by Richard Florida
The Sewing Circles of Herat by Christina Lamb
The Spirit of Community by Amitai Etzioni
The Story of My Life edited by Roger Shattuck and Dorothy Herrmann
To Kill a Mockingbird by Nelle Harper Lee
Washington's Crossing (Pivotal Moments in American History) by David Hackett Fischer
Welcome to the World, Baby Girl! by Fannie Flagg
Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë

Kenneth Koch
 Henry James
 Cormac McCarthy
 Kathy Acker

Topics in Poetry (LIT 5037)

Comte de Lautréamont
 Richard Huelsenbeck
 André Breton
 Fernando Pessoa
 Araki Yasusada
 Frank O'Hara
 John Ashbery
 Bernadette Mayer
 Harry Matthews

On the Great Atlantic Railway
The Bostonians
Blood Meridian
Great Expectations

Maldoror
Dada Almanac
Mad Love
Selected Poems
Doubled Flowering
Collected Poems
Chinese Whispers
Midwinter Day
Oulipo Compendium

20th Century Brit Lit (ENL 4273)

Martin Amis
 Mary Butts
 Angela Carter
 Ivy Compton-Burnett
 Malcolm Lowry
 Mina Loy
 Tom Raworth
 Jeanette Winterson
 Virginia Woolf

London Fields
From Altar to Chimney-Piece
Burning the Boats
Manservant and Maidservant
Under the Volcano
The Lost Lunar Baedeker
Tottering State
Sexing the Cherry
Orlando

Feminist Lit Theory (LIT 4385)

Charlotte Perkins Gilman
 Kate Chopin
 Alice Walker

The Yellow Wallpaper
The Awakening
The Color Purple

Great Books I (LIT 1110)

Homer
 Homer
 Aeschylus
 Sophocles
 Euripides
 Aristophanes
 Herodotus
 Thucydides
 Plato
 Plato

The Iliad of Homer
The Odyssey of Homer
The Oresteia
Sophocles I
Euripides V
Lysistrata
The Histories
The Peloponnesian War
The Last Days of Socrates
Symposium

Black Women Writers (AML 3624)

Harriet E. Wilson
 Zora Neale Hurston
 Paula Marshall
 Alice Walker
 Ntozake Shange

Our Nig
Their Eyes Were Watching God
Brown Girl, Brownstones
The Third Life of Grange Copeland
for colored girls who have considered suicide/
when the rainbow is enuf
Song of Solomon
Mama Day
Your Blues Ain't Like Mine

Black Women Writers - Book Clubs

Dorothy West
 Edwidge Danticat
 Veronica Chambers
 Pearl Cleage
 Pamela Thomas-Graham
 Nella Larsen
 Gloria Naylor
 Terry McMillan
 Alice Randall

The Wedding
Breath, Eyes, Memory
Mama's Girl
What Looks Like Crazy on an Ordinary Day
A Darker Shade of Crimson
Passing
The Men of Brewster Place
A Day Late and a Dollar Short
The Wind Done Gone

FACULTY READING LISTS

The following are some faculty reading lists for lit classes when they are offered. Note that book lists may vary depending on the instructor.

American Lit II (AML 2020)

Denise Levertov
 W.C. Williams
 Philip Whalen

Selected Poems
Collected Poems, Vol. I
Overtime

OFF THE SHELF OFF THE SHELF OFF THE SHELF OFF THE SHELF

Faculty Reading Lists *continued*

African-American Literature (AML 3990)

Slave Narratives by Selected Authors including Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs
 Ralph Ellison *Invisible Man*
 Booker T. Washington *Up from Slavery*
 W.E.B. Du Bois *The Souls of Black Folk*
 James Weldon Johnson *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*
 Richard Wright *Native Son*
 Ann Petry *The Street*
 James Baldwin *Go Tell It on the Mountain*
 Maya Angelou *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*
 Lorraine Hansberry *A Raisin in the Sun*
 August Wilson *The Piano Lesson*
 Zora Neale Hurston "How It Feels to Be Colored Me"

American Lit

Kate Chopin *The Awakening*
 William Faulkner *As I Lay Dying*
 F. Scott Fitzgerald *The Great Gatsby*
 Zora Neale Hurston *Their Eyes Were Watching God*
 Thomas Pynchon *The Crying of Lot 49*
 Don DeLillo *White Noise*
 Art Spiegelman *Maus I and Maus II*
 Joy Kogawa *Obasan*
 Toni Morrison *Beloved*
 Tim O'Brien *The Things They Carried*

Edgar Allan Poe
 Herman Melville
 Ken Kesey
 William Faulkner
 Frank Norris
 Edith Wharton
 John Steinbeck

American Fiction

Selected Short Stories
Moby Dick
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest
The Sound and the Fury
McTeague
The House of Mirth
The Grapes of Wrath

American Literature II

Emily Dickinson
 W. D. Howells
 Brett Harte
 Henry James
 Ambrose Bierce
 Stephen Crane
 Jack London
 T.S. Eliot
 Eugene O'Neill
 Tennessee Williams
 William Faulkner
 John Steinbeck
 Robert Frost
 Charlotte Perkins Gilman
 Arthur Miller
 Ernest Hemingway
 Mark Twain
 Kate Chopin
 Flannery O'Connor
 Alice Walker
 John Updike

Selected Poems
 "Editha"
 "Outcasts of Poker Flat"
 "Daisy Miller"
 "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge"
 "The Open Boat"
 "To Build a Fire"
 "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"
Long Day's Journey into Night
A Streetcar Named Desire
 "Barn Burning"
 "Chrysanthemums"
 Selected Poems
 "The Yellow Wallpaper"
Death of a Salesman
 "A Clean and Well-Lit Place"
 "Cooper's Offenses" and *Huckleberry Finn*
The Awakening
 "The Life You Save Could Be Your Own"
 "Everyday Use"
 "A&P"

Langston Hughes Selected Poems
 Sylvia Plath Selected Poems
 Bernhard Malamud "Jewbird"
 Eudora Welty "A Worn Path"

Fiction and Film

Henry James *The Turn of the Screw*
 F. Scott Fitzgerald *The Great Gatsby*
 Joseph Conrad *Heart of Darkness*
 Francis Ford Coppola, Director *Apocalypse Now*
 Jack Clayton, Director *The Great Gatsby* and *The Innocents*
 "The Book of Matthew" *The New Testament*
 Herzog, Director *Agurr: the Wrath of God*

Intro to Literature (LIT2112)

Source: The Norton Introduction to Literature, Shorter 8th Edition

Short Stories:

M. Atwood, "Happy Endings," 20
 E. A. Poe, "The Cask of Amontillado," 70
 D. Lessing, "Our Friend Judy," 142
 Amy Tan, "A Pair of Tickets," 159
 N. Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown," 189
 Bharati Mukherjee, "The Management of Grief," 224
 Louise Erdrich, "Love Medicine," 257

Poetry

M. Pierce, "Barbie Doll," 619
 A. Rich, "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers," 628
 T. Hardy, "The Ruined Maid," 639
 A. Lorde, "Hanging Fire," 656
 G. Brooks, "We Real Cool," 658
 J. Dickey, "Cherrylog Road," 661
 W. de la Mare, "Slim, Cunning Hands," 696
 R. Burns, "A Red, Red Rose," 722
 W. Blake, "The Sick Rose," 735
 H. Chasm, "The Word Plum," 743
 S. Coleridge, "Metrical Feet," 750
 Anon., "The Young Maiden of Riga," 751
 H. Nemerov, "The Goose Fish," 773
 C. McKay, "The White House," 799
 H. Chasm, "Joy Sonnet in a Random Universe," 803
 D. Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle... 805
 E.E. Cummings, "Buffalo Bill's," 810
 E.E. Cummings, "[l(a)," 809
 G. Herbert, "Easter Wings," 803
 Basho, "This Road," 880; "[Old Pond]" poems, 881
 B. Deutsch, "The Falling Flower," 882
 Anon., "Western Wind," 817
 R. Frost, "Design," 822)

Drama:

S. Glaspell, "Trifles," 995
 L. Hellman, "The Children's Hour," 1028-1078

Some books are to be tasted;
 others to be swallowed,
 and some few to be chewed and digested.
 - Francis Bacon

WRITING ABOUT FICTION

“Flash” Essays: Writing Critical Response Paragraphs

by Chris Yow

Many instructors assign daily critical response paragraphs to ensure that students are reading the assigned texts and to help students think critically about the texts they are reading. These paragraphs do not summarize the text or evaluate whether or not you like the text. They are persuasive analyses, arguments, or interpretations that not only help you think critically about the text you read but also help you formulate ideas that can be expanded into longer essays.

Think of your paragraph as a mini-essay of seven to ten sentences. Obviously, you need to get into your argument quickly and get out before you get too broad in your discussion. In this kind of “flash” essay, all you really have time to do is **state your argument, supply evidence for it, interpret the evidence, and provide a concluding statement.** The first sentence, then, acts as your introduction and thesis statement. State the title of the work you are discussing and the author’s name, and state precisely and concisely what you are going to argue, prove, or analyze about the text. **Don’t state the obvious:** you’re not writing a plot summary, so don’t begin with a topic sentence that’s a factual or obvious statement. The statement must be arguable for you to be able to engage the text. Most instructors provide a list of questions to write about, questions which are great for creating thesis statements. If you can create a one-sentence answer to a question, you’ve probably created a thesis statement. After you’ve established your argument, go through the text and write down or mark passages that support your claim. Of these passages, choose one or two that most clearly support your argument.

Paraphrase or quote these passages as evidence to support your argument. Remember to **introduce them**, stating where they occur or who says them, and **interpret them**, explaining the passages’ relevance to your argument or how they prove your argument. **End your paragraph with a strong concluding statement;** don’t allow your paragraph to putter out at the end. Your concluding statement should be a strong sentence that restates your topic sentence and brings all of your thoughts together into a final comment about the text.

Apply the “So What? Test” to each step in your writing process. Read your thesis, your evidence, your interpretation, your conclusion, and ask yourself “So what?” If you can’t think of a response, then what you’ve written has not been properly developed, and you will need to revise it. **Don’t lose points for poor housekeeping:** always **proofread, edit, and revise** to avoid silly mistakes, awkward sentences, and poor grammar. They not only cost you points, but also detract from the authority you are trying to create in your responses. Critical response paragraphs may seem tedious, but they prepare you for intelligent discussions about the texts, help you learn to read critically, give you practice at formal analytical writing, and give you a head start when it comes time to write a larger essay.

WRITING ABOUT FICTION

1. Decide what aspect of the fictional work you’re going to write about: symbolism, recurring motif, specific theme, a character or characters, etc.
2. Read the work with this aspect in mind.
3. Look for specific quotations to incorporate into your argument.
4. Generate a thesis based on the aspect that you’re interested in. (Ex. In *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Alice Walker uses the South as a symbol of the oppression of the novel’s principal characters.)
5. Introduce the thesis in the first paragraph.
6. If your thesis is simple, ensure that it is clear and specific.
7. If your thesis is complex, ensure that its components are specified and explained.
8. Address one idea per paragraph.
9. Include appropriate comments. (Limit your quotes to less than one-third of the body of the paper.)
10. Interpret every example you give.
11. Ensure, for the benefit of the reader, that your examples are referenced clearly.
12. Use only the most significant examples.
13. Plan before you write.

Quoting Prose

by Chris Yow

According to the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* by Joseph Gibaldi
All examples are from *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* by Alice Walker

Quotations in your paper provide the evidence you need to support your thesis statement. Follow these guidelines when quoting material from a literary text.

- Always document the source you are quoting by using **parenthetical documentation.** Parenthetical documentation includes the author’s last name and the page number(s) the material is quoted from. In a short quotation, use quotation marks to enclose the quoted material. Parenthetical documentation goes at the end of the sentence containing the quote and is placed outside the quotation marks. If you cite the author and page number in the sentence containing the quotation, then the parenthetical citation is not necessary.

“Brownfield knew this movement well; it was the fatal shrug” (Walker 17).

On page 17, Walker writes, “Brownfield knew this movement well; it was the fatal shrug.”

- **Short quotations** can be incorporated into your paper a number of ways. One way is to simply quote the author’s words exactly as written and connect them to your own statement with a colon or a comma. Another way to use a short quotation is to integrate the author’s words into your own sentence.

Brownfield recognizes his father’s lack of compassion: “While his son watched, Grange lifted his shoulders and let them fall” (Walker 17).

The author reveals Grange’s lack of compassion when she writes, “While his son watched, Grange lifted his shoulders and let them fall” (Walker 17).

Brownfield’s father “lifted his shoulders and let them fall,” revealing his lack of compassion (Walker 17).

- For **long quotations** (quotations longer than four lines), you will need to use a block quote. Usually, a colon introduces the quote. The block quote should be double spaced and indented one inch (10 spaces) from the left margin. Do not use quotation marks, and do not indent the first line more than the other lines unless you are quoting two or more complete paragraphs. Use an ellipsis mark (three spaced periods) to indicate words or sentences left out. Parenthetical documentation follows the last line of the quoted excerpt and is outside of the sentence.

Grange’s lack of compassion is apparent when Grange and Brownfield are looking at their house:

Grange stood with an arm across the small of his back, soldier fashion, and with the other hand made gestures toward this and that of the house, as if pointing out necessary repairs. There were very many . . . While his son watched, Grange lifted his shoulders and let them fall. Brownfield knew this movement well; it was the fatal shrug. It meant his father saw nothing about the house that he could change and would therefore give up gesturing about it and he would never again think of repairing it. (Walker 16-17)

If you use a quote, it should be introduced and explained or interpreted. Remember that the quotation itself does not stand alone as evidence for your thesis statement. You must interpret it in relation to the point you are trying to make. If you use a long quotation, it should be followed by an equally long and detailed explanation or interpretation. Don’t use long quotations as a means to lengthen your paper! Usually, one or two quotations per paragraph are all you need to give you plenty to write about. Avoid filling your paper with too many quotations. Stay focused. Remember that you can also paraphrase instead of quoting directly. When quoting or paraphrasing, always remember to remain fair to the author. Do not use statements out of context or omissions that will cause a misreading or misunderstanding of the meaning of the original passage.

WRITING ABOUT POETRY

Quoting Poetry

by Amy Chavers

According to the *MLA Handbook*

- When using quotations from poetry in your own writing, make sure you use quotation marks to frame the work being quoted.

Bradstreet frames the poem with a sense of morality: "All things within this fading world hath end" (1).

- If you are quoting two or three consecutive lines of poetry, you should separate each line with a slash (/).

Cullen concludes, "Of all the things that happened here / That's all that I remember" (11-12).

- Please note the spacing around the slash mark. The *MLA Handbook* shows spaces on both sides of the slash mark.
- Notice in the examples that the line numbers are put in parentheses directly following the closing quotation mark. The word "line" or an "l" is not necessary; simply put the number(s) of the corresponding lines from the text being quoted. Also notice that the period is placed after the closing parenthesis. If you are quoting a line of poetry that ends in a question mark, this punctuation will go inside the quotation mark, and a period will still follow the closing parenthesis.

"What need you / To follow in a house where twice so many / Have a command to tend you?" (4-6).

- Quotations of 4 or more lines of poetry should
 - begin on a new line
 - be indented 10 spaces from the left margin
 - be double spaced
 - not have quotation marks
 - have a period (or ending punctuation mark) after the final word of the quoted poetry, before the parenthesis with the page number.

Elizabeth Bishop's "In the Waiting Room" is rich in evocative detail:

It was winter. It got dark
early. The waiting room
was full of grown-up people;
arctics and overcoats,
lamps and magazines. (6-10)

- When quoting a poem with unusual spacing or spatial arrangements, reproduce the lines as accurately as possible.

e. e. cummings concludes the poem with this valid description of a carefree scene, reinforced by the carefree form of the lines themselves:

it's
spring
and
the
goat-footed
balloonMan whistles
far
and
wee (16-24)

- If you are quoting a piece of a poem that begins in the middle of a line, the partial line should be positioned where it is in the original text and should not be shifted to the left margin.

In a poem about Thomas Hardy ("T.H."), Molly Holden recalls her encounter with a "young dog fox" one morning:

I remember
he glanced at me in just that way, independent
and unabashed, the handsome sidelong look
that went round and about but never directly
met my eyes, for that would betray his soul.
He was not being sly, only careful. (38-43)

Writing About Poetry

Dr. Bill Freind

To write well about poetry, one needs to read well. Here are a few tips for reading poems that will help to make the process of reading and writing a little easier.

- Read the poem at least five times. There's no way to understand a good poem after only one or two hasty readings.
- Annotate as you read. Underline, comment, write questions in the margins of your book.
- Use a dictionary to look up words you don't know. If the poem has footnotes or endnotes, be sure to read them.
- Remember that poetry comes not only from the literal meaning of the words, but also from their sound. Pay attention to how the poem's music—its rhyme, rhythm, assonance and consonance—contributes to the mood or meaning of the poem.

Don't expect your reader to accept a piece of writing you wouldn't accept yourself.

Donald H. Ross

That's not writing, that's typing.

Truman Capote

Organization Topics for a Poetry Paper

Adapted from Dr. Pierre Kaufke's Outline for a Poetry Paper

Introduction

What background information do you know about the poet or poem?

Defining the speaker

Who is the speaker?

What information do you have about the author?

Does defining the speaker shed any light on any of the elements in the poem?

Defining the situation and the setting

Do the time and place of the poem's action link to the poem contextually?

Defining structure

What is the external structure of the poem: form, rhyme scheme, pattern, appearance?

What is the poem's internal structure: content, plot, story? Is it dramatic or narrative?

Is there a twist?

How do the internal and external structures interrelate?

Defining language

What is the meter or rhythm? What are their effects?

What metaphors, similes, symbols, or allusions are used? What are their effects?

How does the poem sound? What are the effects of the sound?

Conclusion

Can you summarize the poem?

Can you make a connection to it personally or universally?

SAMPLE "WORKS CITED" ENTRIES

By Stephen E. Willoughby

The Modern Language Association (MLA) requires that researchers, or authors, "generously acknowledge their debts to predecessors by carefully documenting each source, so that earlier contributions receive appropriate credit" (142). It is customary to provide this information on what is called a Work(s) Cited page. The Work(s) Cited page is the last numbered page of the research paper—the Work(s) Cited page IS A SEPARATE PAGE. At the top and centered, write "Works Cited" if you are using more than one source and "Work Cited" if you use only one. Lines are double-spaced throughout. For additional information, consult the [MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers](#), 6th ed., or visit the Writing Lab (Bldg. 51, Rm. 157).

Follow the stipulated MLA format:

A NOVEL

Author's Name. Title of Novel. City, State: Publisher, copyright date.

Follett, Ken. Pillars of the Earth. New York: Morrow, 1989.

A WORK IN AN ANTHOLOGY

Author's Name. Title of Work. Title of Anthology. Name(s) of Editor(s). City,

State: Publisher, Copyright Date. Pages of Selection.

Shakespeare, William. "The History of Troilus and Cressida." *The Riverside*

Shakespeare. Eds. G. Blakemore Evans, J.J.M. Tobin, et al. Boston: Houghton

Mifflin Company, 1997. 477-532.

A JOURNAL

Author's Name. "Title of Article." Title of Journal Volume Number (Year): Pages of Selection.

Winslow, Joan D. "The Stranger Within: Two Stories by Oates and Hawthorne." *Studies in Short Fiction* 17 (1980): 263-8.

A JOURNAL ARTICLE FROM AN ONLINE SOURCE

Author's Name. "Title of Article." Title of Journal Volume or Issue Number (Year): Pages. Name of Database. Date of Access <website>.

Reid, Nicholas. "Form in Coleridge, and in Perception and Art More Generally." Romanticism on the Net 26 (2002) 27 January 2005 <<http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2002/v/n26/005699ar.html>>.

THE BIBLE

Name of the Bible. Editor(s). City, State of Publication: Publisher, Copyright Date.

NIV Study Bible. Ed. Kenneth L. Barker. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

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Gibaldi, Joseph, ed. MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. 6th ed. New York: The Modern Language Associate of America, 2003.

PRESENT TENSE AND LITERATURE

from *Real Good Grammar, Too* by Mamie Webb Hixon

Use the present tense to discuss the contents of a literary work, even though the work was, of course, written in the past and even though the author may have used past tense throughout the work. It is said that the information about characters in literature exists in what is called the "eternal present," since for every new reader, for example, "*Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison **charts** the journey..." and Willy Loman **is** the tragic hero...":

Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison **charts** the physical and psychological journey of a black man from the South to Harlem.

Willy Loman **is** the hero in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. He **is** the quintessential common man, whose seemingly petty failures **are raised** to the level of tragedy.

When discussing the facts of the writing and publication of a literary work, use the past tense. Historical information about the author should also be expressed in the past tense. Information about the work itself and other historical facts are usually expressed in present tense. Current facts about living authors should be expressed in the present tense too.

Edgar Allan Poe **became** famous with his publication of the poem "The Raven."

The novelist Willa Cather **grew up** in Nebraska, and the prairie country **is** the setting for many of her works.

Nathaniel Hawthorne **was** a New Englander and a writer of short stories and novels. Among his works **are** *The House of Seven Gables* and his masterpiece *The Scarlet Letter*.

Toni Morrison **received** the Nobel Prize for literature in 1993 and *is* the first African American to receive this award. (*The present tense is used to indicate the historical present.*)

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