

Checklist for English Essays

Format. The paper should follow Modern Language Association (MLA) format guidelines. This includes headings, margins, title, use of correct format for citing sources of quoted passages, and the inclusion of a Works Cited List whenever you use direct quotes. The guidelines are outlined in this handout, on our Library Web site, and in the *Seabury Hall Writer's Handbook*. The paper should be typed and double spaced. Use a standard 12 point font such as Times, New Times Roman, or Helvetica.

Intro. The intro includes:

- * an opening that makes your essay immediately interesting and provocative to the reader.
- * the title and the author of the work under discussion. Titles of novels and full length plays are underlined (Merchant of Venice) or italicized (*Hamlet*), while titles of short stories, poems, and songs, are put in quotation marks ("I Want To Hold Your Hand"). Words of the titles are capitalized.
- * a core thesis statement that states the argument and purpose of the paper. If an assignment has a specific prompt, the thesis should address that prompt clearly and completely.

Body paragraphs. Each body paragraph contains:

- * a topic sentence that grows logically out of the thesis and clearly states the purpose of the paragraph.
- * multiple specific details from the text that support the topic sentence.
- * multiple short quotes that are integrated into sentences (with correct punctuation) and that support the topic sentence.
- * page number references for each quote (punctuated correctly).
- * explanatory material that links details and quotes back to the topic sentence.
- * verbs which are in PRESENT TENSE! When describing fictional action, always use the present tense verbs, e.g.: As Grendel approaches Herot, Beowulf lies in wait.
- * transitions that link ideas. (See the handout on using transitions.)

Conclusion. The conclusion contains a discussion of the thesis idea in general, philosophical terms.

Essays will be graded on the following scale:

B range. A B range analysis will fulfill all the criteria listed in the rubric above, but will be flawed in ways that do not diminish the fundamental clarity and coherence of the paper as a whole. One of the body paragraphs may lack

sufficient detail, the logic of certain explanations may be unclear, the intro and/or conclusion, though clear in purpose, may be lackluster. A B paper may be too rigid and lifeless in its adherence to form, lacking acknowledgment of ambiguity, graceful transitions, or interesting connections from paragraph to paragraph. An A range paper can land in the B range if it contains too many mechanical errors (generally, 3 or more errors in spelling, punctuation, verb tense, agreement, or format, or 2 or more major sentence errors).

A range. An A range paper fulfills all the criteria listed in the rubric and shows evidence of inspired thinking and crisp, polished writing. This might mean the pursuit of a particularly ingenious and original thesis, the finding and developing of clever connections between words and passages (ones not given to you in class), or the use of eloquent language signaling a high degree of personal commitment to one's argument. In all cases, an A paper will focus on close reading of the text, and employ multiple examples to illustrate its points. In all cases, an A paper will contain few to no mechanical errors.

C range. A C range paper has a clear overall point and purpose, as evidenced by a clear thesis and the writer's attempt to organize paragraphs in such a way as to illustrate that thesis. But a C paper will suffer from lack of clarity and coherence at the body paragraph level. Topic sentences may lack clear connection to the thesis. Evidence may either be completely lacking, poorly chosen, or not tied back to the original arguments. Papers that are shorter than the assigned length will receive a C range grade. A B range paper may receive a C if it contains too many mechanical errors.

D range. A D range paper has problems at the thesis level. It lacks a clear purpose and, hence, presents problems of organization, logic, and clarity throughout. Extremely short papers, and papers with a ridiculously high number of errors will receive D's.

F. This grade is reserved for either a paper that a) is appallingly short, b) completely off topic, c) contains more errors than correct words and sentences.

0 - Plagiarized papers receive this grade.

Body paragraph tips:

The key to an effective body paragraph is the acronym PEE which stand for POINT, EXAMPLE, EXPLANATION. The POINT is just that--the general statement that tells the purpose of the paragraph, otherwise known as the topic sentence. EXAMPLES are those references to the text that support, illustrate, and define the point. These include summary statements of what happens (action) and quoted passages. The EXPLANATION is the discussion of the example. Explanation is absolutely critical and serves several purposes: it

explains how the example relates to the point of the paragraph (t.s.) or to the paper as a whole (thesis); it presents a close discussion of the example, often raising other related points; it can contain language that guides the reader to your next paragraph, thus giving unity to your paper.