

Rubric for Senior Essays

A senior level essay should have the following features:

Introduction--The intro should include:

- the titles and authors of the works under discussion. Remember to underline or italicize the titles of full length works and put the titles of poems and short stories in quotation marks.
- a thesis statement that does the job of connecting the “how” and “what” of the literary work in some meaningful way.

“How”: How do one or more of the structural features of the work serve to suggest and reinforce the meaning?

”What”: What is the theme/issue/main idea of the work or works under discussion? This statement of meaning must be at the appropriate level of specificity--neither too general (e.g. “love”, “death”), nor too specific (i.e. a statement that merely summarizes the action).

Body paragraphs--Each body paragraph should:

- have a clear and logical purpose as part of the overall discussion and support of the thesis. This purpose should be apparent from the topic sentence and transitional phrases.
- contain multiple details and quoted passages from the works under discussion.
- contain discussion that explains the importance of the supporting details and quotes to the thesis.
- show evidence of a *mind at work* in the discussion of details: e.g. develop second points, recognize ambiguity and irony, raise contradictions that will later be resolved.

Conclusion--A conclusion should:

- contain a more global and reflective discussion of the issues presented in the thesis. The conclusion reaches beyond the work to finally assess the importance and beauty of the author's ideas.

Format--The paper should:

- be typed, double spaced, and use “Times” font.
- follow MLA guideline for heading, margins, and title (including the last name, page # heading starting on page 2; check the sample papers in the handbook for a picture).
- use MLA format for citing quotes.
- use present tense verbs when describing fictional action.
- have an MLA style Works Cited List.

Essays will be graded on the following scale:

B range--A B range paper will fulfill all of the criteria above, but will be flawed in ways that do not diminish the fundamental clarity and coherence of the paper. One of the body paragraphs may lack sufficient detail, the logic of certain explanations may be unclear, the intro or conclusion, though clear in purpose, may be lackluster. A B paper may be too rigid or 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, more than 3 per page).

A range--An A range paper fulfills all the criteria listed above and shows evidence of original thinking and crisp, polished writing. This might mean the pursuit of a particularly daring, ingenious thesis, the recognition of interesting connections between passages and ideas (beyond those discussed in class), or the eloquent use of language signaling a high degree of commitment to the craft of writing. In all cases, an A paper will contain few to no errors.

C range--A C range paper has a clear, overall point, as evidenced by a clear thesis and the writer's attempt to organize paragraphs in such a way as to support thesis. But a C paper will suffer from lack of clarity and coherence at the body paragraph level. Topic sentences may be lacking. Supporting detail may be spare. Papers shorter than the assigned length will be excellent candidates for a C. A B range paper that contains too many errors will fall into the C range.

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

F--This grade is reserved for papers that a) are appallingly short, b) are off topic, or c) contain more errors than correct sentences.

0--Plagiarized papers receive this grade.

Late policy:

Major assignments are due at the beginning of class on the assigned due date. They must be stapled and ready to hand in at the start of class. Papers that are late will be penalized 10% per *calendar* day, and that penalty will begin on the day a paper is due, after the class period has ended. There will be a 5% penalty assessed if you are late to class on the day a paper is due. PAPERS THAT ARE MORE THAN ONE WEEK (7 CALENDAR DAYS) LATE WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED AND WILL RECEIVE A "0".

Note that a paper is due even if you are out of school for an "excused absence." If you are not going to be in school on the day a major assignment is due, you must find a way to get it to me, or the normal late penalties will be imposed. The only exceptions to this rule are 1) long term illnesses that begin prior to the due date and about which I have been informed by phone, and 2) sudden family emergencies of an extreme nature (e.g. God forbid, death, severe injury); again, I must be informed of these by phone. Furthermore, if your absence is determined to be "unexcused" the late penalty will be doubled (20% per day). Do not stay home on the day papers and projects are due!

Sample thesis:

In his novel *The Tortilla Curtain*, T.C. Boyle takes a critical look at American upper middle class society, not only in its conventionally crass materialistic forms, but also in its latest obsessions with organic foods, haute cuisine, and a new environmentalism. Through the character of Delaney Mossbacher, Boyle satirizes and ultimately condemns as hypocritical the bourgeoisie's attempts to find peace and serenity by communing with nature while living as American consumers. In his use of nature imagery in the novel, particularly in the scenes in which Delaney takes his nature hikes, Boyle reveals the superficiality of Delaney's philosophy and the fragility of the ideas on which he has built his lifestyle.

Parenthetical reference format:

After picking up his new car, Delaney decides to park at a trail head and take an afternoon hike. However, he is haunted by the fact that his previous car had been stolen while he was hiking. Delaney is consumed with conflicting feelings of fear and guilt. He sees the car “glittering in the sunlight through the stalks and the branches of the vegetation that lined the trail” (155). He thinks “you couldn't hold on to everything, could you?” but “for the moment, he didn't care” (155-6). Delaney wants to feel as if he is free, above the ugly paranoia that characterizes his neighbors in the subdivision. Leaving the car behind to hike into the woods would affirm his love of nature as well as his liberal, egalitarian values. But Delaney is unable to do this. Instead, “He was just going to sit here...hidden in the bushes, sit here and watch” (156).

Work Cited Format:

Boyle, T. Coraghessan. *The Tortilla Curtain*. New York: Penguin Books, 1995.

Steinbeck, John. “Chrysanthemums.” *Literature: A Portable Anthology*. Ed. Janet E Grdner et al. Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 2004. 180-188.