

Some words of advice when writing literary essays:

- Underline titles of plays. Put titles of shorter pieces in quotation marks. The play *Hamlet* is underlined or italicized (do one, not both, be consistent). The character Hamlet is not italicized.
- Use quotes from original sources to substantiate your interpretation and opinions. Failure to use quotes for support will severely lower your grade. At a minimum, use at least one quote for “proof” per paragraph. More is better, but don’t overdo them either.
- Put quotation marks around any lines that you quote directly.
- Use parenthetical documentation for all quotes used. [l:ii:123-125 — Act:scene:line numbers]
- Don’t write sentences of fluff—sentences which don’t really say anything, but take up space on the page. (“Each man’s part reveals his literal meaning and symbolism to the eventful history of his own life.” Yes, someone really wrote this! Blech!)
- Include in your summary only the points necessary to support your thesis.
- The thesis should restate the question or prompt and be worded as your OPINION.
- Each body paragraph must start with a topic sentence that supports one aspect of the thesis and that is worded as opinion.
- Use “Shakespeare says or states or writes” instead of “Shakespeare quotes.” “Quote” is used when you are using someone else’s words. Since Shakespeare wrote these lines himself, the word “quotes” is incorrect usage. Be sure to quote passages exactly word for word as written.
- When referring to authors or poets always use their last names, not just their first names. Using last names is more respectful, and besides you have never met them personally. Therefore, use “Shakespeare,” not “William.”
- Always write about literature in the present tense for the most part. However, if you are referring to something that happened earlier in the work, it is okay to use past tense to reference that.
- Similarly, if you use multiple examples to illustrate your point, go chronologically with the examples. It’s confusing if you discuss something at the end, then in the middle, back to the end, and then from the beginning, unless you are developing some point where such jumping around makes sense. Mostly you’ll just confuse your reader.
- Always make sure that what you say is accurate. Don’t make up things that didn’t happen in the work (the story, novel, play, or poem). Get the characters straight and spell their names correctly.
- Get the genre right! *Hamlet* is a play, a drama, a tragedy. It is not a book, a novel, or a story.
- Remember to sandwich your quotes as we discussed last semester:

Introduce the quote by establishing context (what’s happening in play) or by establishing your purpose for the quote

Insert the quote. Make sure it’s a complete sentence that makes sense. Use quotation marks; do inset indent if quote is longer than three lines; include citation for quote.

Most important, explain the significance of the quote. What insights can you offer your reader? Analyze why the author used it. What truths are revealed?