

ENGLISH 1020E
Understanding Literature Today
Section 003
Fall-Winter 2014-2015

- **Fall/Winter 2014-2015**
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- **Lecture:** Wednesdays, 7:00pm – 9:00pm
- **Tutorials:** Wednesdays, 9:00pm – 10:00pm
- **Classroom:** D. B. Weldon Library 258
- **Tutorials:**
 - D. B. Weldon Library 258 (056)
 - Sommerville House 3307 (057)

Where does “literature today” come from? What is “literature today” like? The literary texts that we read and enjoy in English were not born from a vacuum, but developed from a richly diverse and immensely complicated cultural tradition that spans hundreds of years and every continent on earth. This section of ENG1020E will explore the connections between literature and culture, with a particular focus upon both modern and early modern texts and ways of writing. In the course of these explorations, we will read poetry, fiction, criticism, plays, a graphic novel, and literature in digital formats, including blogs, social media, and video, while discussing these within such contexts as colonialism, sexuality, and identity.

Recognizing that all texts are, to some degree or another, “social texts,” produced and ultimately read and understood as much by communities as by individuals, this section of ENG1020E will focus some attention upon group work in tutorial and lecture, and will engage students as an online community through blogging and social media. A fair amount of time will be devoted to learning how to write university-level essays, and students will also be introduced to a number of research tools and methodologies.

Master Schedule

Below is the “Master Schedule for Section 003 of ENG1020E. There is a separate page for each text that we are reading and studying; please follow the links below for details on these texts, as well as “Prereadings” for each, which should be read *prior* to the lecture. Links to online texts that are designated “LION” are to versions available through the *Literature Online* database, and require the use of a university-networked computer, or log-in to “Off Campus Access” through the library’s web site. [*Note: This schedule remains provisional and subject to change until the second week of September.*]

First Term

Week 1 — September 10, 2014

Some Ways to Read Poetry

Philip Larkin, “This Be the Verse.” (Online – LION)

John Donne, “The Flea” (Online)

Tutorial 1: Introductions

Week 2 — September 17, 2014

Some Ways to Read Poetry (cont’d)

Tim Minchin, “Storm” (Online)

Tutorial 2: Metaphor and Metonymy

Week 3 — September 24, 2014

Representing and Being the Other

Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal* (Online)

Tutorial 3: Irony and Voice

Week 4 — October 1, 2014

Representing and Being the Other (cont’d)

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

Tutorial 4: Essay Writing: Designing a Thesis
Essay 1 DUE in tutorial

Week 5 — October 8, 2014

Representing and Being the Other (cont'd)
Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (cont'd)

Tutorial 5: Essay Writing: Structuring an Argument

Week 6 — October 15, 2014

Representing and Being the Other (cont'd)
Derek Walcott, “A Far Cry from Africa” (Online)

Tutorial 6: Technology Workshop: Yarny and Voyant (in Social Science Centre 1032)

Week 7 — October 22, 2014

How People Read
Samuel Johnson, *Rambler* #4 (“On Fiction”) (Online)
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “The Aeolian Harp” (Online – *LION*)

Tutorial 7: Writing Review: Sentence Structures

Week 8 — October 29, 2014

How People Read (cont'd)
W. H. Auden, “Musée des Beaux Arts” (Online — *LION*)

Tutorial 8: Workshopping Thesis Statements (1)

Week 9 — November 5, 2014

How People Read (cont'd)
Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Online)

Tutorial 9: Workshopping Thesis Statements (2)
Assignment 1 DUE on Friday, November 7

Week 10 –November 12, 2014

“Sexual Intercourse Was Invented in 1963”: Some Poetic Preoccupations

Philip Larkin, “High Windows” (Online – *LION*)

Irving Layton, “Misunderstanding” (Online)

Tutorial 10: Writing Review: Effective Paragraphs

Week 11 — November 19, 2014

Some Poetic Preoccupations (cont’d)

Andrew Marvell, “To his Coy Mistress” (Online)

Tutorial 11: Podcast/iMovie Workshop

Week 12 — November 26, 2014

Some Poetic Preoccupations (cont’d)

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, “The Lover: A Ballad” (Online)

Tutorial 12: “The Proper Subjects of Poetry”
Essay 2 DUE in Tutorial

Week 13 — December 3, 2014

Some Poetic Preoccupations (cont’d)

Eliza Haywood, *Fantomina* (TBA)

Tutorial 13: In-class Essay

Second Term

Week 14 — January 7, 2015

Many Selves

Christina Rossetti, *Goblin Market* (Online)

Tutorial 14: Research Methodologies (1)

Week 15 — January 14, 2015

Many Selves (cont'd)

Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*

Tutorial 15: Research Methodologies (2)

Week 16 — January 21, 2015

Many Selves (cont'd)

Satrapi, *Persepolis* (cont'd)

Tutorial 16: The Library

Week 17 — January 28, 2015

Watching from the Stage: Parody and Metatheatre

Tom Stoppard, *The Real Inspector Hound*

Tutorial 17: Storyboarding

Week 18 — February 4, 2015

“Each in His Narrow Cell”: Elegy and Allusion

Thomas Gray, *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* (Online)

Tutorial 18: Citation and Documentation

Week 19 — February 11, 2015

Elegy and Allusion (cont'd)

Tony Harrison, *V*

Tutorial 19: Reading Secondary Sources

February 18, 2015

Reading Week: No Classes

No Tutorial

Week 20 — February 25, 2015

Fun Things to Do with Fragments

T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (Online)

Tutorial 20: “Tradition and the Individual Talent”: Reading Backwards (Online)
Assignment 2 DUE in tutorial

Week 21 — March 4, 2015

Fun Things to Do with Fragments (cont'd)

Eliot, *The Waste Land* (cont'd) (Online)

Tutorial 21: Podcast/iMovie Workshop Session

Week 22 — March 11, 2015

Fun Things to Do with Fragments (cont'd)

Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*

Tutorial 22: TBA
Vodcast DUE on Sakai/OWL

Week 23 — March 18, 2015

Fun Things to Do with Fragments (cont'd)

Winterson, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (cont'd)

Tutorial 23: TBA

Week 24 — March 25, 2015

Curation: Experiments in Form and Medium

Ransom Riggs, *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*

Tutorial 24: TBA

Week 25 — April 1, 2015

Curation (cont'd)

Jezebel (Blog)

“I Fucking Love Science” (*Facebook*)

Tutorial 25: Randomness and Design: Types of Authority

Essay 3 DUE in Tutorial

Week 26 — April 8, 2015

Reading Your Computer Reading

TBA

Tutorial 26: Exam Strategies

Evaluation and Course Info

Method of Evaluation

Essay 1 (Passage Analysis: 500 words)	5%
Assignment 1 (Thesis and Structure)	5%
Essay 2 (1800 words)	10%
Assignment 2 (Research Bibliography)	5%
Essay 3 (Research Essay; 1800 words)	15%
Podcast Assignment	5%
In-class Essay	10%
Participation/Tutorial	10%

Final Exam	35%
	100%

Course Objectives

While this course has many intended outcomes, the focus is in particular upon two objectives: firstly, a better understanding of how to read, understand, and interpret literary texts of all kinds, and, secondly, the skills and understanding necessary to write a university-level analytical essay.

Successful students who complete the course will be able to:

- Identify and analyze basic elements of literature, such as plot, character, point of view, theme, setting, imagery, diction, tone, figures of speech, syntax, and rhythm;
- Write an essay about a work of literature, containing an effective thesis supported by adequate evidence from the original text;
- Research critical commentary on literary works;
- Evaluate the relevance, reliability, and usefulness of research sources, especially those obtained through the Internet;
- Integrate outside research materials and references to the original text into an essay through use of quotations and paraphrases;
- Organize and present ideas clearly and effectively;
- Document essays using MLA format.

Attendance

Attendance at both lectures and tutorial is obligatory. Participation in tutorial discussion is a very important part of this course, and it is expected that all students will take an active part in these weekly meetings. Attendance at tutorials will be taken, and a participation mark, worth 10% of the final grade, will be assigned on the basis of work done in tutorial.

Penalties for Late Work

Essays should be brought to class and handed in on the date specified above. Late essays will be penalized at the rate of one percentage point for each working day that they are late, to a maximum of ten points. Essays submitted more than two weeks late will not be accepted unless accompanied by an acceptable reason for the delay (e.g., a medical certificate; see Academic Accommodation below). Late essays may be submitted at the Department of English Essay Drop-off Box.

Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

Plagiarism Checking: The University of Western Ontario uses software for plagiarism checking. Students may be required to submit their written work in electronic form for plagiarism checking.

Presentation of Written Work

Written work should be submitted double-spaced, preferably typewritten or computer-printed. Use one side of the paper only, with 1 inch margins for all four edges. Use a font size that will permit no more than about 250 words per page: 12 point is standard. Submit the work fastened by a paper clip rather than staples; do not have it “bound.” Text should be justified only to the left margin. The guidelines for layout that appear in the more recent editions of the Modern Language Association Handbook are recommended; see the course web site for further details on formatting.

Academic Accommodation

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth (either alone or in combination) 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The Student Medical Certificate (SMC) can be found at <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medicalform.pdf>

The full policy is set out here:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf

Term Work and the Final Exam

Please note that students **must pass the term work for the course to write the exam**. Students going into the exam with a failing grade in the course work will not be permitted to sit the final exam. Students must pass both course work, and the final exam, to pass the course.

Assignments

Essay 1

(Length: 400-500 words)

Due Date: Tutorial 4 (October 1, 2014)

Weight: 5%

Write a brief analysis of Pablo Goldstein's "We Provide Meals that Are Completely Unaffordable and Unappealing to People Who Actually Live in this Neighbourhood," published online in *McSweeney's*. Discuss the ways in which the writer establishes the meaning of this piece, and "guides" (or tricks?) the reader into interpreting it in a particular way or ways. What exactly is Goldstein trying to communicate? How effectively is this managed?

You will not have space to provide a full introductory paragraph or conclusion, but your essay should nonetheless both "introduce" and "conclude" in a logical manner, and should show evidence of a logical structure that provides a scaffolding for your argument. You do not need any "apparatus" (i.e., bibliography or citations) for this exercise. For a little more guidance, you may wish to consult the Essay 1 Guidelines for this assignment. Also of some value are the course Essay Guidelines for Students, which include more detailed information (only some of which is applicable to this

assignment) on essay writing.

Assignment 1

Thesis Draft and Outline

Due Date: (Friday, November 7, 2014)

Weight: 5%

Choosing one of the essay topics listed for **Essay 2**, below (the work you produce for this assignment should, ideally, serve also as the topic for your this essay), produce a brief thesis statement.

In 100-200 words, write in proper English, a draft “thesis” statement for your proposed essay in paragraph form. This should outline a) your subject (i.e., what aspect of your chosen text you are planning to write about, and b) what you intend to prove about this in your argument.

For guidance on what constitutes a good thesis, see the course web site at:

<http://instruct.uwo.ca/english/020e-002/site/resources.html#thesis>

In addition, Tutorials 8 and 9 will be devoted to further discussion on designing a thesis.

Note: While this exercise is intended to assist you in preparing your first term essay, you are not obliged to use the thesis, argument, or even essay question you employ here for that essay. Indeed, one of the points of this exercise is to provide feedback from your tutorial leader so that you can adjust your thesis or argument to produce a better final essay.

Essay 2

(Length: 1200-1500 words)

Due Date: Tutorial 11 (November 26, 2014)

Weight: 10%

Choose a topic from those listed below, and write a short essay. This need not be a research essay. Please remember that the penalty for lateness is 1% per business day. All papers not handed in during

class should be left in one of the essay drop-off boxes in front of the main English office, University College. For guidance as to the criteria used to evaluate essays, please see *Guidelines for Essays*. For essay format, consult “MLA Tips” on the Dept. of English Web Site:

<http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergrad/MLAstyletips.html>.

Topics

- Donne’s “The Flea” does not simply use a central metaphor to describe his “relationship” with the woman he is wooing: it is actually about metaphors, and how they work. Explore this poem as a poem about metaphors.
- Discuss the speaker of Jonathan Swift’s *A Modest Proposal*, focusing particularly on the ways that Swift reveals his “personality” and perspective. What are the clues that this is someone with whom we should not sympathize?
- Explore the depiction of “whiteness” in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. What are the associations and meanings of this colour, and how do they change as the novel unfolds? Relate this to the larger themes of the novel.
- Perform a close reading of Walcott’s “Out of Africa,” focusing upon such things as metre, form, rhyme, and word choice. How do these contribute to the meaning(s) of the poem?
- Apply Samuel Johnson’s discussion of the novel, and his characterization of the responsibility of the writer of realistic fiction, to Achebe’s *Out of Africa*. Who would this novel bear up under a critique that employed Johnson’s criteria?
- Apply Auden’s perspective on the function and nature of art as it is expressed in *Musee des Beaux Artes* to a movie you have recently seen. Be sure to discuss the movie primarily through the lens of Auden’s poem and his understanding of what art such as that of Bruegel “does.”
- Discuss Woolf’s understanding, as articulated in *A Room of One’s Own*, of the importance of gender to writing. Do women write differently than men? How is this important? And is this a “good” thing?
- Compare Larkin’s “This Be the Verse” to his “High Windows.” What similarities in theme or treatment are there in these two poems? What generalizations can we make about Larkin’s

poetry and his poetic interests on the basis of these two poems?

You should consult the Essay Criteria sheet for both an understanding of how these will be marked, as well as a useful series of tips to help you construct your essay.

Vodcast Assignment

Due Date: Tutorial 22 (11 March, 2015)

Weight: 5%

Choose a text that we are examining this year (from either term), and, working in project groups of 4-5 students, create a 3-5 minute vodcast (i.e., video and audio recording) in MP4 format that explores some aspect of that text.

This is a creative project, and you need not produce a video that simply “explicates” a text. You could, of course, produce a mini-documentary about some aspect of the work (the author, or historical context), but I encourage you to consider also a more imaginative approach. Focus on some particular aspect of it that you can draw upon in a creative manner. For instance, you might stage a re-enactment of a scene, produce an animated reading, or create a wholly new scenario that alludes to or even parodies the original.

The key, aside from creativity, is to produce a video that *says* something, through whatever means, about the text.

Evaluation

A criteria sheet is available that will give you some sense of how this will be marked. Please note the weighting given to 1) creativity, and 2) connection to original text. Technical excellence is a relatively less important part of this exercise, so worry less about making your video look “professional” than about how creative and interesting your ideas for it are.

20% of your mark for this assignment will be based upon an evaluation of your contributions to the project by your teammates. These will be sent directly to the TA; those you are evaluating will *not* be

told how you evaluated them.

Project Management

In the “real” working world, you will likely almost never work alone, but will nearly always be collaborating as a part of teams. As a collaborative project, this assignment reflects that fact; working together efficiently as a group is very much an important part of the exercise.

Choose a Project leader: this person will be required to submit a **Progress Report** (100-200 words) on the status of your planning and execution of the video by **11 February (Tutorial 19)**. This should briefly outline the theme and approach of the project, and provide some sense of progress on the planning and creation process. The progress report is not in and of itself “worth” marks, but the vodcast will not be accepted without one having been submitted. Note that, while the progress report is submitted by the project leader, producing it is the responsibility of the *entire* project team.

Submission

Your finished vodcasts will be submitted to OWL. Instructions on how to do this will follow shortly.

Assignment 2

Research Bibliography

Due Date: Tutorial 20 (February 25, 2015)

Weight: 5%

Choosing one of the essay topics listed for the second term Research Essay, below, locate and research at least three secondary sources that are relevant to that topic. There are two parts to this assignment.

Part 1

List your three secondary sources, which should consist of **one of each** of the following kind of secondary source:

1. A full-length book on the author whose work you intend to make the subject of your paper.

2. An article in a **scholarly journal** located through Western Libraries' online catalogue, and available online (usually in PDF form) through the one of the library catalogues electronic journal databases.
3. An article, blog post, or other resource relevant to your topic that is freely available on the web (rather than through Western Libraries). This should *not* be a piece published in a scholarly journal. You should locate this through a freely available search engine such as Google, Yahoo, or Bing.

Part 2

Provide a brief (100-200 word) justification for why you think that the web source that you found in 1 above is trustworthy and worthwhile. Consider such elements as the identity and qualifications of the author, the institution (if any) with which the author or work is associated, and the presence within the web piece of scholarly information such as citations or bibliographies.

Essay 3

(Length: 1500-1800 words)

Due Date: Tutorial 25 (April 1, 2015)

Weight: 15%

Choose a topic from those listed below, and write an essay based upon it. This is a research essay, and must involve the use of at least three secondary sources. These sources will likely (but need not be) the same sources that you have found for the Research Bibliography Assignment. For guidance as to the criteria used to evaluate essays, please see [Guidelines for Essays](#).

Please remember that the penalty for lateness is 1% per business day. All papers not handed in during class should be left in one of the essay drop-off boxes in front of the main English office. For essay format, consult "MLA Tips" on the Dept. of English Web Site:

<http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergrad/MLAstyletips.html>.

Topics

- While we never hear the actual voice of the woman who is the target of the dramatized seduction in Andrew Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress,” we can construct, in some detail, both her responses and character from the speaker’s own language and argument. What is she like, based on the evidence of the poem? How does her implied character and response impact upon our understanding of the poem?
- Although it seems, in parts, to be a celebration of female desire and liberation, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s “The Lover: A Ballad” begins with an attempted seduction, and concludes badly for women. Discuss the poem’s depiction of female desire, with a particular emphasis upon the implications of the concluding stanza.
- Eliza Haywood’s *Fantomina* is too brief to be considered a novel, and is most conventionally described as a “romance.” It contains, nonetheless, many elements and features that look ahead to the novel form that was, by the 1740s, to become established as one of the most important literary genres. With particular reference to Samuel Johnson’s *Rambler* 4, and to other descriptions of the novelistic form, discuss *Fantomina* in the context of “the novel.” Explain why this is an important question.
- Christina Rossetti’s *Goblin Market* identifies itself in many ways as a moral fable for children. Discuss this poem as a work of children’s literature. In what ways does it particularly target younger readers, and how are its language, images, and themes particularly appropriate for children? How, in this sense, does it differ from “adult” poems?
- A graphic novel such as Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* depends, to a great extent, upon the interplay of meaning between image and text. Examine some of the ways in which particular images comment upon, or change the meaning of the accompanying text, or vice versa. For this essay, you will likely need to include scans of the images you discuss.
- Because Tom Stoppard’s *The Real Inspector Hound* breaks through the “fourth wall” to some degree, it can be seen as a play about plays, and about the audience’s relationship with the action and characters on stage. Discuss what this play has to say about that relationship.
- Thomas Grey’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” employs a theme, images, and language that are “melancholic” in nature, with a focus upon sobering and sad self-reflection. How does the poem evoke melancholy, and what is the point of this tone? Of what use is

melancholy?

- Tony Harrison's *V* is, most literally, a monologue by the poet, but it also features an imagined argument between the speaker and a fictional hooligan. How is this fictional interlocutor created, what is his nature, and what is his function in the poem?
- Discuss the particular images, theme, and function of one titled passage or section of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, placing it within the context of the poem as a whole.
- Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* employs colour in its title, and throughout its narrative. Discuss the meanings and purpose of these colours, and how they relate to the novel's overall themes.
- To some degree, Ransom Riggs' *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* is a formulaic novel for teens, borrowing, in particular, a great deal from J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. How does it relate to that formula, how does it depart from it, and what is the point and function of those departures?
- Blogging is, really, a literary genre that has emerged only within our own lifetimes as one of the most popular and engaging forms of writing. Provide a detailed analysis of one blog post on Jezebel, paying particular attention to the features that make it "literary." Why are these literary devices used? How are they used in this particular post?

Essay Guidelines for Students

What follows is a set of loose "criteria" which will guide the evaluation and grading of essays in English 020E, Section 002, as well as series of useful "Tips" to help ensure that your essay is effective and up to university standard. The criteria employed for marking essays will, to some degree, vary from first term, when you are *not* expected to produce a "research" essay, to second term, when you are. Note is made of such differences as may be applicable below.

These criteria should *not* be viewed as rigidly prescriptive, although they do represent a fairly standard and conventional view of what comprises a university-standard undergraduate paper. I have also not assigned numerical values to the various criteria below: this document will *not* tell you that "grammar" is worth, say, 20% of the final grade for your paper. This is because a) I think such an approach badly misrepresents the way in which essays written in the humanities are *actually* evaluated,

and b) it is not flexible enough to account for the way in which form and content inform one another. There is for that reason a fair amount of overlap between criteria.

The Essay as a Demonstration of Student Abilities

These criteria are founded upon certain broad **assumptions** about what we are **asking you to demonstrate** when you write essays. These can be said to include:

- **A command of the subject and materials**
- **An ability to reason analytically**
- **An ability to communicate effectively**
- **A substantial and sound understanding of the conventions and uses of the essay form itself**

All of these are more or less equally important.

Important Criteria for Marking Essays

The list that follows is not exhaustive, but constitutes the *main* elements that are likely to impact upon the grade that you will receive for a paper. Many of these overlap each other (for such, after all, is the nature of language that what we say frequently merges with how we say it), and others are, to some degree, “subsets” of primary criteria.

- **Quality of content**
Self-evidently a paper is evaluated on the strength, comprehensiveness, and subtlety of its content. Has all, or the best of the available textual evidence been used? Has enough reference been made to the textual evidence to provide a solid anchor for the argument?
- **Quality of thesis statement**
The “thesis statement” is a clear expression, generally in the essay introduction, of main point(s) to be demonstrated or proven. The thesis statement provides an all-important “road map” for all that follows: without it, the argument may make little sense to the reader as it unfolds through reading.
- **Quality of conclusion**
This criterion represents your success at recapitulating and reinforcing in a brief form the main points of the argument within a “conclusion” to the essay. This usually includes a short restatement of the thesis.
- **Employment of transitions**

Transitions between paragraphs, ideas, and “sections” of the argument can be both formal, through the use of transitional sentences, or conceptual, in the sense that there is a logical connection between ideas that have been placed together in a sequence.

- **The structure or “flow” of the argument**

Related in obvious ways to the use of transitions, this criterion is based upon the degree to which the overall argument is logically and effectively structured. There are, of course, a number of different ways to structure any given argument, but all of these are not likely to be equally effective. A simple structure (as, for example, in the case of an essay that organizes itself according to the chronological sequence of the narrative of the original text) can work, but is probably not the most effective means of expressing an argument. The grade that you will receive will reflect the effectiveness of your choice in this regard.

- **Persuasiveness of argument**

Overall, does the argument “convince”? This criteria rests to some degree, of course, on others: how valid are the supporting points, how strongly and effectively are they communicated, and how well are they integrated into the larger argument?

- **Sophistication of argument**

This evaluates the *effectiveness* of the argument. Does it achieve what has been promised by the introduction and thesis statement? How “clever” is it? Does it rely solely upon obvious points, or does it evoke more nuanced or subtle point in support of its thesis?

- **Acknowledgment of and response to contrary evidence**

It is important that you learn to anticipate possible objections to your arguments, and to respond to these within the essay. A failure to do so may seem to suggest that you have not considered potential problems or objections that others might make.

- **Avoidance of reductive or simplistic arguments**

This is a sort of “negative” criterion, and penalizes papers that have oversimplified or otherwise misrepresented textual features and themes used to support their argument. Arguing, for example, that Minchin’s *Storm* represents an entirely negative attack upon a particular perspective on science may miss the degree to which the speaker of the poem subtly undercuts his own position by depicting him as a little drunk, and overly belligerent.

- **Use of citation from primary sources**

How effectively and extensively have you been at employing textual evidence in the form of citation as support for your argument? Has the *best* evidence been employed, or has a central passage been neglected? This criterion can also be negative, when you have employed citation unnecessarily, ineffectively, or as mere “filler.”

- **Use of citation from secondary sources**

This criterion obviously applies only to “research” papers. Have secondary sources been employed judiciously and effectively? Conversely, criticism or commentary can be misused, or irrelevantly and unnecessarily deployed.

- **Quality of secondary sources**

Again, this criterion applies only to research papers. This is a relatively minor criterion, as students at the first-year level are not expected to have developed the skills or experience required to make very effective evaluations of secondary sources. Nonetheless, you should try to ensure that the sources that you do use are valid and trustworthy. This is particularly true of online sources. Is your source from a reputable institution? Is the author qualified to comment authoritatively? One note: while it is acceptable to consult Wikipedia or other similar online sources for background information and context, ***do not use them as evidence for your argument, as these lack the quality control necessary to ensure that the information is trustworthy.***

- **Documentation of sources**

This applies, again, only to “research papers,” and is really nothing more than a simple measure of whether all primary and secondary sources have been acknowledged and documented thoroughly and according to established scholarly standards. Has MLA format been used?

- **Style**

This criterion measures the effectiveness of your prose style and rhetoric (as opposed, where the two are separable, from its grammatical correctness). Obviously a well-written paper is more effective and convincing than a bland or boring one. Word-choice and diction most often falls into this category.

- **Grammar and spelling**

Again, this is a simple measure of your ability to employ written English in a grammatically correct manner. Some faults are obviously more important than others: pronoun reference problems are probably less important than major sentence faults (such run-ons, comma-splices, and sentence fragments).

- **Improvement in targeted areas over last essay**

This evaluates your success and effort at correcting problems that have been identified in your previous written work. Although not a major criterion, you will find that you are rewarded when you respond effectively to criticism and instruction, and are penalized commensurately when you appear to be making the same errors over again.

A Few Tips and Pointers for Students

- It is important ***not to be tentative*** about your argument. You are trying to “prove” something: don’t undercut your argument unnecessarily by using phrases like “it seems,” “it appears,” or “it seems likely.” These terms suggest that you lack conviction in your own argument, or are trying to hedge your bets. This said, however . . .
- ***Do not overstate your argument***, or be afraid to admit when a point is less clear-cut or even certain than it might seem. Literature is by nature complicated and nuanced: if everything that could be said about a text were obvious and uncomplicated, there would be no need to continue studying old texts anew. You should certainly be unambivalent about your central

thesis, but you will only strengthen the impression of your analytical abilities by conceding complexity or ambiguity where it exists.

- **Avoid generalities, statements of the self-evident, or banalities.** Remarks such as “This poem is effective because of the use to which it puts metre, rhyme, and image” do little or nothing to contribute to an argument, and merely take up space. Comments like “Since the beginning of time, people have been oppressed by the thought of death,” or “John Milton was a great poet” similarly represent unprovable and ultimately useless generalizations.
- Be sure that all of the points that you make **support or in some way contribute** to your argument. Evidence and analysis, however valid or interesting in its own right, that does *not* assist you in the task of explaining and proving your argument does not belong in your paper.
- **Use transitional sentences** (almost invariably at the beginning or conclusion of your paragraphs) to link ideas and points. The impression of an effective, logical, and “smoothly-flowing” argument is much enhanced by the use of simple statements that show how the next idea relates to the previous one.

Example:

. . . Clearly, Hardy is deeply disturbed by the prevalence of misfortune, pain, and unhappiness in the world.

At the same time, however, is not merely the fact that humans suffer that most disturbs him. For Hardy, it is finally the absence of any kind of divine agency that is source of true despair. . . .

- **Use a “hook” to introduce your first paragraph.** Your introduction will be much more effective if you can spark the reader’s interest with an initial comment or point (relevant, obviously, in some way to your argument) that points to and underlines the interest and value of the thesis that you are about to outline. One effective type of hook employs a particularly vivid or interesting detail from the text relevant to your thesis. You should not, of course, actually try to make your argument here: the hook merely highlights an interesting problem that you are trying to address or solve.

Example:

“They fuck you up, your mum and dad.” Thus begins Philip Larkin in his poem “This Be the Verse.” The shockingly abrupt and casually obscene nature of this pronouncement underlines the seriousness of Larkin’s basic theme: human “misery” is of human origin, and has its roots in the very act of procreation and generation. . . .