**BBN-ANG-103 Literary and Cultural Studies: Contemporary Approaches**

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**Essay Writing Checklist**

This checklist is meant to helps students write their first academic essays in literature.

Read the instructions below before submitting your seminar paper and make sure it meets all the requirements. Further useful ideas can be found in *How To Write Critical Essays: A Guide for Students of Literature* by David B. Pirie.

1. Language and Style
2. **Formal style**: no colloquialisms (everyday spoken English), no informal expressions (’somehow’, ’actually’, ’a bit’), no contractions (don’t, isn’t, haven’t), no slang, etc.
3. Write sentences (long and complex, if need be) with clear logic. Be clear and direct.
4. **Grammar**: **set language to English** (whichever variety) on your word processor. Use spell check (and grammar check). Use the **first person** for your own insights, views, ideas for the sake of clarity and transparency. Do not be afraid to speak in your own name, feel free to use the **active voice**. **Sources**: use of third person. e.g. ‘According to x’, ‘As x puts it/observes/claims’, ’To speak with x.’ Adjust tenses (do not mix tenses, the basic tense of essays is the **present simple**, e.g. ‘Hamlet puts on an antic disposition and pretends to be mad’). Make sure that the **reference of each pronoun** is clear.

B) Structure and Compulsory Components

1. **Title**: make sure you have an independent title (you must not simply repeat the title of the work you analyse); make sure your title indicates your focus (and potentially your thesis); make sure your title is properly capitalised. Do not choose a too general title e.g. ‘Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*’, but a more focused one, e.g. ‘Time and Action in Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*’.
2. **Introduction**: make sure your essay has an introduction; make sure it is one that states your **thesis** (what you claim about the work) and your **focus** (the literary aspect from which you analyse the work).
3. **Paragraph** structure: one idea = one paragraph. The main idea should be clearly stated in a **topic sentence** (which then the whole paragraph elaborates through textual examples and arguments from the author and the critical literature). Each paragraph is the elaboration of an idea subjected to your thesis statement, a logical step in your argument.
4. **Consistency** and **coherence**. Connect and link paragraphs: ‘As I mentioned above’, ’Similarly’, ’In contrast’, ’On the other hand’, ’In addition’, etc.
5. **Conclusion:** round off your argumentation neatly (summarize your main arguments, revise your initial thesis in the light of them, or reach a general level, etc.). Do not just stop writing after one of your arguments is completed.

C) Sources and References

1. **Avoid plot summaries**: include a brief outline of the content only when it is absolutely necessary for your argument.
2. Use of **sources**: State your agreement or disagreement with the secondary literature. Clarify why you are referring to that specific source. What is its connection to your argument? Make sure your quotations do not hang loose.
3. **Referencing** sources: footnotes or endnotes containing all bibliographical data.
4. Preferably use sources according to **MLA** (recommendation, not obligatory).
	1. <https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html>
	2. Book **titles** in italics, short titles (essays, poems etc.) between quotation marks.
	3. Clearly indicate sources (page number in parentheses after each quotation or paraphrased idea).
5. **Works cited/References** at the end: primary and secondary sources. This is a references list and should only include items you have actually referred to. However, it must include all of those. Include all bibliographical data in the Works cited/References section: author, title, place of publication: publisher, year of publication. In case of journals: title, issue and volume number, year, and page numbers.
6. **Use only academic sources** that have an author, a title (paper, journal article, book, book chapter, etc.), and a publisher. This applies also to internet sources, in case of which add the website access, http://.......
7. There are 3 ways to use sources: verbatim quotation (use quotation marks!), paraphrasing or summarizing (in your own words). In all 3 cases reference your sources!
8. Avoid Sparknotes, Poemanalysis, Gradesaver, Litcharts, Wikipedia and other unreliable and/or oversimplified sources.