

The grading scheme

What follows here is taken from the student handbook *Writing literature essays in the English Department*. It is the section on scoring marks, but there are added details footnoted with each section to help you standardise what is required for each grade level. You should attach a grade sheet to each essay, with a **letter-grade** given for each section. Don't try to manipulate numbers. You will only need to work out the percentage on the final draft. Letter grades are more meaningful. A copy of the grading sheet is included in *Appendix 2*.

Note: if you are setting an assignment which does not require all the elements of an argumentative essay, point out to students exactly what you are wanting. For example, if students are writing a reader-response, they will not have to do any secondary research. This does **not** mean that they should not do a bibliography. They should **always** be encouraged to include the bibliographic information of the edition they are examining. In cases such as this, the marks given for secondary argument should be amalgamated with the primary argument. All else can stay the same. It might be that you are wanting only a literature review, in which case there will be no primary argument – those marks will be amalgamated with secondary argument marks. The important thing is to make sure always that your students know what you expect of them.

Scoring marks in a literature essay

Thesis statement (5%)¹

Getting the thesis statement right is probably the single most important aspect of good essay writing. The statement should begin as follows: “This essay will argue that”

This is what I would call the formulaic thesis statement. Until you have experience in writing scholarly essays, you should actually use that formula. If you do so, it will help you formulate your argument. You should then look at every single sentence in your essay and ask yourself: “Does this relate to my thesis statement?”

¹ For an A+, there must be a perfect thesis statement and it must be obviously arguable – i.e. it should be something which is defensible and yet which isn't so obvious that no one is likely to disagree. If the thesis statement basically fulfils these requirements, but it's less than 100% perfect, you might give it an A or A-. For a grade in the B range, the thesis statement would have to be sound, but lacking spirit – it would be technically OK but probably rather obvious – not something anyone would argue against. A grade in the C range would mean that you have come to the end of the first paragraph with an intuition of what the essay is about, but there is no clear statement. A D-range grade would mean that there is no clear statement and you “think” – but are not sure – you know what the essay is about. If you get to the end of the first paragraph and have no idea what the essay will argue, the only possible grade is F.

As you become more experienced in writing essays, you can perhaps drop the formulaic thesis statement and replace it with something more individualised. Remember, however, that your reader should be able to read your first paragraph and then construct a thesis statement from what you have said in your opening. If you move away from the formulaic thesis statement, try giving your opening paragraph to a friend to read and ask your friend to complete the sentence: “My friend’s essay argues that....” If your friend cannot do this, or if s/he gets it wrong, then there is something wrong with how you have constructed your thesis or your opening paragraph.

The next aspect of a good thesis is that it must be arguable. In this you should ask yourself two questions:

1. Might a reasonable person disagree with me? If you can answer “yes” to this question, then you have a good argument on your hands. If any reasonable person would never disagree with you, then you cannot be making an argument. In order to make an argument, you have to convince. If the reader is already in agreement with you, then you have no one left to convince. In this case, you are “preaching to the converted”. Your essay will lack power. The second question you must answer is:
2. “Can a reasonable person be expected to be persuaded to change his/her mind as a result of reading my essay?” If the answer to this is “no”, then you might be making an argument but it is an argument you cannot win. Do not even attempt to write such an essay. You have to make an argument, of course, but it has to be something with which others might reasonably be expected to agree.

Introduction (5%)

Generally speaking, introductions are often done badly. But they don’t need to be. An introduction in an essay should be single paragraph which

- (1) introduces the topic,
- (2) defines any special terms which need defining,
- (3) gives a clear thesis statement, and
- (4) provides an outline of the essay.

² If there is a clear thesis statement, and a good outline of the arguments and conclusion, score this as a B or B+. If background information is sound and relevant items are adequately defined, score it in the A range. An A+ would need some degree of class – something eye-catching, something which makes you keen to read on. If there is no outline of the essay, do not give a grade higher than C, even if definitions, thesis statement, etc., are well done. If there is some attempt at a line saying what the essay is about, but very little else, score it in the D range. If at the end of the first paragraph, you have no idea what the essay is about, give the Introduction an F.

The outline is very important. I have mentioned above that you are not writing a detective novel. Don't put any surprises into your essay. Tell your reader in your opening paragraph exactly what you are going to say and how you are going to say it. Say what your conclusion is going to be. (See below for more details about what "conclusion" means.) This outline could almost be the topic sentences of your paragraphs, but of course they need to be connected in a logical way when put into an outline.

It would be rare for someone to score an A+ on an outline. There is always room for improvement. But an A- (or even an A) is certainly possible.

Primary argument (40%)³

This is where you score the bulk of your marks. "Primary argument" refers to your own analysis of the primary (literary) text. How well you do this depends on your original thesis and how provable it is.

Your primary argument should form the central three paragraphs of a basic five-paragraph essay, the first paragraph being the introduction and the last being the conclusion. While there has been some criticism of the 5-paragraph format, it is a good idea to master this before trying something more individual. The most innovative writers in history have conquered the conventional forms before introducing new forms.

The three central paragraphs should each cover one aspect of your argument. The length of each paragraph depends upon the length of your essay. As a general rule, each paragraph should be about 20% of the whole. Each paragraph should encapsulate a mini-thesis, with each mini-thesis relating back to the thesis statement found in your opening paragraph.

³ This is where we expect some critical thinking on the part of the student – it is the student's own analysis of the text. If the understanding is accurate and well supported by appropriate quotes, and if the argument is fresh and original, this can probably score an A-. Only in exceptional cases would you give an A for this part, and once every year or two, if you are lucky, you'll come across that argument deserving of an A+ — that student who you expect will go on to graduate studies, and possibly a Ph.D. A grade in the B range would mean that the argument is sound, the quotes are valid, but it's all lacking in freshness — if you've seen it all before, but the student obviously has a sound understanding of the issues and has done it well, this should earn a B and perhaps a B+. A B- would be for that essay which has all the requirements but is just missing out on being something you would want to show, with pride, to a colleague. A C-range primary argument means an adequate attempt but it's lacking in any original thought. This student has been going through the motions of doing that which is required but hasn't put any enthusiastic effort into the essay. A C- essay might show enthusiasm but be basically wrong in some places in terms of understanding. A D-range essay probably lacks both accuracy and enthusiasm, but is not so bad that you feel you can fail it. If there is no real argument, no supporting quotes, and it's pretty clear that the student is making do with having read York Notes, fail it!

Secondary argument (15%)⁴

This is the second most important part of your essay. If you are writing a reader-response, where reference to secondary/critical sources is not required/desired, these 15 marks will be added to those for the primary argument.

Secondary argument refers to your use of secondary (critical, theoretical, historical) texts to support your argument. Make sure you quote wherever possible – the art of paraphrasing is very difficult and it is best to learn how to quote before you learn how to paraphrase. Quotation is also more accurate, but make sure you check all quotes. Also remember that no matter how you quote, the grammar of your sentence must be accurate.

If you use secondary quotes well, if they are appropriate and the right number (too many or too few will result in a loss of marks) you will probably score a C+ for “Secondary argument”. If you want to score higher, you have to do more than just quote the critics – you have to engage them in dialogue. Say why you are using them; *show* the value of the quote in relation to your thesis statement. One very good way of learning how to “engage” the critics is to find a critical text which disagrees with your thesis statement. You then have a text against which you can argue. Show why you think this critic is wrong, and look for evidence in the primary text, plus opinions of other critics, to prove your point. It is often easier to argue *against* a text. This is a ploy few students use; most think their own essay will be stronger if they only choose critical texts which support what they say, but the highest scores often go to those brave students who are able to disagree with published critics. Remember, though, that it is not enough simply to disagree – you must always be able to *prove* what you are saying. Proof lies in the text.

⁴ When students know that they are going to get marks for consulting secondary texts, they at least cut down on plagiarism. But there is a tendency to string together a series of quotes from numerous (often too many) texts without an attempt at discussion. If there is no discussion, no attempt to set critics against each other or against the thesis statement, *never* give a grade higher than B-. A grade of A- would mean using excellent sources, and using them well, and not just quoting from them but actually taking the quote and doing something with it. There should, on average, be one such effort for every 500 words. Take appropriateness of text and quote into account when deciding on a grade. If there is an obvious attempt at research but the quotes used bear little relation to the thesis statement, keep the score in the C to C- range. If it's clear that a student has picked a couple of quotes out of one or two texts simply to fulfil the requirements, score this in the D/D+ range. A D- score would mean a secondary source has been used but it's tangential at best, and the essay would be exactly the same without it. If secondary texts are quality texts, try to give a C- score at least (as an encouragement to keep using good sources) and comment on the value of the source. If the source is some study guide (Cliff Notes, York Notes – you can tell by the publisher's name in the bibliography) never give higher than a D+, and make a note that such sources are unacceptable. Don't accept online sources at all, unless they are from referred journals found in EBSCO, JSTOR, and the like.

Conclusion (5%)⁵

“To conclude”: what an interesting verb this is. There are two basic meanings – one is “to end”, “to terminate”, “to bring to a close”. If you check out a thesaurus, you will find many different synonyms. Your conclusion must of course be an ending. It “closes” your essay. But it must do more than that.

The second meaning is “to deduce”, “to interpret”, “to reason”, “to figure out”. This meaning is vitally important to writing a good conclusion. Having made your argument, you must now draw a conclusion, an interpretation, a deduction. The way you do this is quite simple. First you must summarise your argument. “From the points above” does *not* constitute a summary, but you would be surprised how many times I have seen that at the start of a concluding paragraph. Referring your reader back to paragraphs 2-4 is not enough; you must actually give a brief summary.

At the same time as you summarise, you must *show how* the *three arguments* made in your essay *prove your thesis*. Your thesis statement is in fact your conclusion (deduction). By relating your summarised arguments back to the thesis statement, you are able to prove your thesis statement (although you should never use the word “prove” – see below in the section entitled ***Overall***). By showing clearly the link between argument and deduction, you not only conclude/deduce, you also conclude/end.

Citation (5%)⁶

The first rule is to cite the source of *any idea* which is not your own. Failure to do so means you are guilty of *plagiarism*.

Citing the source is done in different ways depending on whether you are quoting a primary or secondary text.

⁵ If the conclusion begins “from the above ...”, never give it higher than a C-. This is totally inadequate. For an A-range grade, the conclusion must summarise the main points and show *how* they prove the thesis. A good conclusion to a one-thousand word essay should be around 150 words, or half a page, and it must include deductive reasoning. There should be some repetition of the thesis statement, but this can be embedded in the deductive reasoning. If the summary is good but the link to the thesis is not adequately made, the conclusion should score a B- or less. A C-range grade means a few lines which attempt to link the argument back to the thesis but without using specific examples and without any real deductive reasoning. The perfunctory “Therefore it is clear that ...” is definitely a D conclusion. No attempt at closure is an F. This means that the essay has come to an end and you didn’t even realise the end was in sight. When reading the conclusion, it should be obvious from the opening sentence that this is indeed the conclusion.

⁶ It should be easy enough for all students to score an A+ in this. All first citations from the primary text (page number only required) should include a footnote with details about the edition being used. If more than one primary text is analysed, the title abbreviation must be explained. Page numbers should be given for all citations. If one is citing an online, non-numbered source, the first instance should bear a footnote explaining the online source. If all these are done, it’s an A+. If there is acknowledgement, but no page numbers are given, it’s a D (unless it’s an online source). If there are quote marks but no acknowledgement, it’s an F. Page numbers must ALWAYS be given for primary texts — if not, it’s an F.

Quoting primary texts: Never use the author's name when quoting from a work of literature. If your essay is about a single literary work, you need only give the page number. The first time you quote from the primary text, you should add a footnote (see below: *Using Microsoft WORD*) which gives the edition details of the text you are using. This is done outside the bracket surrounding the page number. I have included an example (Example One) taken from an actual first-year essay. There are several things to note. First, this is a quote within a quote – i.e. I am quoting from an essay which is quoting from *Jane Eyre*. Second, this is a lengthy quote so it is separated. All quotes of more than two or three lines should be separated in this way. The whole *quote is indented* both sides by 1cm (see *Using Microsoft WORD* for instructions on how to do this) and there is a *space above and below the quote*. Note also that when quotes are indented this way, there are *no quotation marks* at the beginning and end of the quote. If the quote is shorter and therefore embedded in your own text, then quotation marks are used. *Do not use italics* for quotes. Italics are for book titles only. The most important thing to examine is how the citation is done. Include the page number, then a footnote. The footnote appears at the bottom of the page.

Example One

This “rage” is Jane’s attempt to stand up for herself, to confront and defeat her oppressor. She is obviously unable to match his strength but she establishes, in “a moment’s mutiny” (24),⁷ that she is unwilling to let others take advantage of her.

It is not usual to quote whole sentences. It is more common to quote parts of sentences, or phrases, and to include these quotes within your own. You will see that this is the case with the above example. This student has included one noun phrase, “a moment’s mutiny”, in her own sentence. Notice that the quoted phrase contributes to a grammatically correct full sentence.

Sometimes, in order to make a quotation fit the grammar of your own sentence, it is necessary to change a word – maybe a verb needs to be changed in person or tense, maybe a noun needs to be changed. Take the following sentence from *Jane Eyre*:

Example Two

“I doubted not – never doubted – that if Mr. Reed had been alive he would have treated me kindly” (28).

⁷ All quotations come from this edition of *Jane Eyre*: Charlotte Bronte. *Jane Eyre*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin, 1996.

A student wanted to quote this line in her essay, in the context of a psychoanalytic reading of the relationship between Jane Eyre and her uncle Reed. In order for the quote to make sense, it has to be changed from first person to third person (see Example Three). When the first person pronouns are removed, and replaced with third person pronouns, the change from the original is marked by the use of square brackets (always square, never round brackets). Note that the original words are left out. Note also that this is the first occasion in this particular essay that this student has quoted from the text, so, like the student in Example One, this student has footnoted details about the edition of the text being used:

Example Three

Freud's theory can be applied to Jane's perception of how her relationship with her Uncle Reed would be if he were alive -- as a protector and present father figure. She says that "[she] doubted not – never doubted – that if Mr. Reed had been alive he would have treated [her] kindly" (28).⁸

Another point to note is that the full-stop comes *after* the page reference. The footnote marker always comes outside the punctuation.

So, you use square brackets when you are replacing words in a quote, but also if you are going to add a word which was not in the original.

Sometimes you want to leave words out of a quote. This is marked with three dots, an ellipsis. Let's say, for example, that in the above line, you decided that the words "never doubted" were not necessary for your meaning. The quote would then look like this:

Example Four

"[she] doubted not ... that if Mr. Reed had been alive he would have treated [her] kindly"
(28).

This technique is only for words removed from the middle of quote. If the words you leave out are at the beginning or end of a quote, do not use the ellipsis. So you never write

⁸ All *Jane Eyre* quotes are taken from the following edition: Charlotte Bronte. *Jane Eyre*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin, 1996.

Example Five

“... if Mr. Reed had been alive”

nor do you write

Example Six

“if Mr. Reed had been alive ...”

If you are quoting more than one sentence, and you are leaving out words at the end of the first sentence, then you do have to use an ellipsis but you also have to include the full-stop to signal the end of that sentence. In that case you use four dots (Example Seven). This is an example of a long quote, covering more than one sentence, but with a part left out at the end of one sentence. Note that there are four dots at this point:

Example Seven

The fairy-tale element allows Bronte to include elements of magic and fantasy Fairy-tale enables Bronte to reach beyond the moral and ethical constraints that Christianity sometimes enjoins upon women (Clarke 2).

I have said that if you are analysing just one literary text, the only reference you need for the citation is the page number. If you are quoting from more than one text, then the title of the book needs to be included, but this can be abbreviated. The abbreviation must also be footnoted the first time a citation is used. If the essay written by the second student quoted above had included a comparison of *Jane Eyre* with some other literary work, then the quote would be as follows (please note the additional comment in the footnote):

Example Eight

She says that “[she] doubted not – never doubted – that if Mr. Reed had been alive he would have treated [her] kindly” (*Jane Eyre*, 28).⁹

⁹ All *Jane Eyre* quotes are taken from the following edition: Charlotte Bronte. *Jane Eyre*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin, 1996. The title *Jane Eyre* will henceforth be abbreviated as JE.

When the next quotation is made, let's say also from page 28, the bracketed part should read: (JE, 28). Note the use of the comma; this is optional. Whether or not you include a comma is up to you, but please be consistent. Consistency in the use of conventions is very important.

Quoting secondary texts: when quoting from secondary texts, it is necessary always to include the name of the author. I will again use examples taken from the essay which used psychoanalytic theory to study the text of *Jane Eyre*.

Example Nine

Moreover, Jane has a female fantasy with her Uncle Reed when she is in the red room
“filled with symbolic female spaces – secret drawers [and] wardrobes” (Sadoff, 521).

This quote is taken from an essay included in the back of the Bedford edition of *Jane Eyre*, written by Dianne Sadoff and entitled “The Father, Castration, and Female Fantasy in *Jane Eyre*”. If the writer of this essay used a second article by Sadoff, it would be necessary to include the year of publication in the citation:

Example Ten

Moreover, Jane has a female fantasy with her Uncle Reed when she is in the red room
“filled with symbolic female spaces – secret drawers [and] wardrobes” (Sadoff, 1996:521).

Note that the year and page number are separated by a colon, but no spaces. If there were two articles by Sadoff and they were both written in the same year, then letters are used to differentiate them (e.g. 1996a, 1996b, etc.), and those letters must be included *in the bibliography*, next to the year:

Example Eleven

Moreover, Jane has a female fantasy with her Uncle Reed when she is in the red room
“filled with symbolic female spaces – secret drawers [and] wardrobes” (Sadoff, 1996a:521).

Quoting online texts: I have mentioned above that *page references* are required for *all* citations. If your only access is a digital text this might not be possible. If you can find the hard copy source text, then of course you should take the page references from that. If your text is in the JSTOR database, which uses *Acrobat Reader*, then you can get the original page numbers off the screen. For most of the EBSCO

texts this is not possible. When you cite such a text, therefore, you will not be able to give a page reference. Again a footnote is required and this should be done when the first citation of that text is made. Examine the following example:

Example Twelve

Other female characters in the novel seem to lack the determination and faith in their own will: Miss Temple is “swallowed up by marriage” (Clarke)¹⁰.

By putting in this footnote, you are signalling to your reader that page references are not available. You only have to put this footnote in the *first* time you cite Clarke.

You should constantly refer to this section when writing your essays and make sure you get your citations right. It will not only ensure an A+ grade in this section of the grading chart, it will also save you from accusations of plagiarism. Thorough and accurate citation is always necessary. Once you learn the conventions, you will be able to do them in your sleep!

Bibliography (5%)¹¹

This is another easy A+ if you do it right. There are two things we do not want to see in a bibliography. This first is omissions. If you cite a work in your essay, that work must be included in your bibliography. The second is texts which you did not use.

It is common practice in some disciplines, especially in the social sciences and linguistics, to include in your bibliography all texts which you have consulted in the writing of your essay – and you might have been taught to do this. The rationale for this is valid enough: even if you do not find something specific in the article which you wish to quote in your essay, it might have influenced your writing and therefore acknowledgement needs to be made that the text was consulted. Generally speaking, however, I find this convention problematic, especially given the tightening laws in the area of intellectual property rights. It is my belief that if an idea in your essay owes its origins to something

¹⁰ All references to Clarke are taken from Online EBSCO Publishing. The article appears without original pagination: Micael M. Clarke, “Brontë’s Jane Eyre and the Grimms’ Cinderella”. Online EBSCO Publishing . *Studies in English Literature*. Autumn 2000, Vol. 40 Issue 4, p695, 16p.

¹¹ Unless some other format is specifically called for, students should use the format given in this section. If they learn how to do this one properly, they can spread their wing later on. If it’s perfect, give it an A+. If it’s nearly perfect (maybe they have bulleted it or something stupid like that) give them a A. If there is some actual error (but only one), it’s a A-. If they have left out the city from the entries (a common error) give them a B-. If they have a good bibliography but the texts are not acknowledged in the essay, fail the bibliography. They should not have texts in the bibliography to which they have not referred in the actual essay, either body or footnote. If they do, fail the bibliography. They have probably plagiarised anyway, but even if not, failure to follow the conventions needs to be seen to be penalised.

read in another text, that text should be acknowledged at the point the idea is mentioned. If it is tangential, then the least you should do is include a footnote acknowledging that source. Be careful how you do this – it can sound awfully contrived. You might footnote a comment¹² such as the one I have here put in Footnote #14.

The convention of including all texts consulted does *not*, fortunately, apply to literature essays. If it did, you would find Ph.D. dissertations which were 350 pages long and which had bibliographies which were 400 pages long. It is possible that you might consult some texts, which you know have been useful, even though you have not quoted from them and if this is the case you should split your bibliography into two parts: *References* and *Works Consulted*. The distinction between these two is that “References” are texts you *referred* to in your essay; “Works Consulted” are texts which were not referred to but which were nevertheless useful in helping you formulate your own thinking. If, however, you have found a text to be useful, it is my contention that you should be able to find something in it to quote or paraphrase (and acknowledge) which will be relevant to your essay. I have had cases of students getting a zero grade on secondary argument because they have cited no secondary text in their essay, and yet they might have a bibliography of 8 or more texts. Not only will this result in a zero grade for secondary argument, it could also result in a charge of plagiarism being made against you. If I find that an idea from a secondary text has been used but not acknowledged, I *will* fail that essay.

What is likely is that you will consult many different articles which turn out to be of no use at all. You will generally consult an article based on its title (which is the main reason you need to spend time getting the title of your own essay right). It is possible, indeed probable, that many of the texts you consult will be absolutely useless to you. That is not to say that the texts themselves are useless but that they are not appropriate to your thesis. If this is the case, do *not* include those texts in your bibliography.

Below is a bibliography containing many different types of text, including texts which have been taken from a digital source. Study each one carefully, and pay special attention to the punctuation. You should note that this is not the only way of doing a bibliography; there are different styles in use (the common ones being Chicago and MLA) and every publishing house has its own style. The important things are consistency and inclusion of all relevant information. Note the following:

¹² The idea of abc is further explored in John Doe, *The mystery of ABC*. Roswell: UFO Publications, 2010.

- (1) the authors' names are inverted (family name first)¹³;
- (2) the list is in alphabetical order;
- (3) the list is neither numbered nor bulleted;
- (4) the names line up on the left – second and subsequent lines are indented 1cm;
- (5) book and journal titles are italicised;
- (6) chapter and article titles are put in quotation marks;
- (7) where online sources have been used, this information is included;
- (8) city of publication is required for books but not for journals.

Bibliography

- Bronte, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin, 1996.
- Gilbert, Sandra. "Plain Jane's Progress" in *Jane Eyre*. Beth Newman (Ed). Boston: Bedford/St. Martin, 1996.
- Kendrick, Robert. "Edward Rochester and the margins of masculinity in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*". Online EBSCO Publishing: Ipswich, MA. *Papers on Language & Literature*, Summer94, Vol. 30 Issue 3. p. 235, 23p.
- Perkin, Joan. *Victorian Women*. New York: New York University Press, 1993.
- Peters, John G. "Inside and Outside: Jane Eyre and marginalization through labeling". *Studies in the Novel*, Spring 96, Vol. 28, Issue 1, p57, 19p.
- Schwartz, Nina. "No Place Like Home: The Logic of the Supplement in *Jane Eyre*". *Jane Eyre*. Beth Newman (Ed). Boston: Bedford/St. Martin, 1996.
- Young, Arlene. "The Monster Within: The Alien Self in *Jane Eyre* and *Frankenstein*". *Studies in the Novel*, Fall 91, Vol. 23, Issue 3, p324, 15p.

If the above bibliography had been used for a linguistics essay, it would look slightly different. The year is generally put in brackets after the author's name (with a full-stop after the closing bracket). I have also split the list, assuming some texts have been cited and others not:

Reference

- Bronte, Charlotte. (1996). *Jane Eyre*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin.
- Gilbert, Sandra. (1996). "Plain Jane's Progress". *Jane Eyre*. Beth Newman (Ed). Boston: Bedford/St. Martin.
- Schwartz, Nina. (1996). "No Place Like Home: The Logic of the Supplement in *Jane Eyre*". *Jane Eyre*. Beth Newman (Ed). Boston: Bedford/St. Martin.
- Young, Arlene. (1991). "The Monster Within: The Alien Self in *Jane Eyre* and *Frankenstein*". *Studies in the Novel*, Fall 91, Vol. 23, Issue 3, p324, 15p.

¹³ If there are two or more authors, invert ONLY the name of the first author. This inversion is only done for alphabetical-listing purposes. It is pointless to invert names within the bibliographic entry.

Works consulted

- Kendrick, Robert. (1994). "Edward Rochester and the margins of masculinity in *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*". Online EBSCO Publishing: Ipswich, MA. *Papers on Language & Literature*, Summer94, Vol. 30 Issue 3. p. 235, 23p.
- Perkin, Joan. (1993). *Victorian Women*. New York: New York University Press.
- Peters, John G. (1996). "Inside and Outside: Jane Eyre and marginalization through labeling". *Studies in the Novel*, Spring 96, Vol. 28, Issue 1, p57, 19p.

English¹⁴

The English Department is not an ESL unit and does not teach English language courses. That does not mean that we ignore correctness in grammar. Good English is essential for good argumentation. It is also much easier to read. You should aim at least for correctness. Error-free English will earn a grade of B; two or three minor errors will result in a B- grade. Anything more than this cannot hope to earn more than a C+ and in some cases students can be so careless with proof-reading that they end up with D+/C- grades for English.

I have often been asked how, if a student's English has no errors, one can hope to earn a higher grade than B. Easy: be Shakespeare! OK, that's an exaggeration, but in order to score more than a B grade, you must show some degree of rhetorical sophistication. Look first at vocabulary – do you repeat a word in a sentence or paragraph when you should be looking for a synonym? Are you using "adult" words? For example, a child might use "car"; a more sophisticated noun phrase would be "motor vehicle".

Look also at sentence structure. Are subordinate clauses used? Is there a connection between syntax and meaning? Examine the following sentence:

- (1) *This is where Jane's equality can base upon.¹⁵

The first problem with this sentence is that the preposition "upon" is not needed. However, taking it away does not make the sentence correct. A possible construction would be:

- (2) This is where Jane's equality can be based.

The passive construction here works and is error free. A more sophisticated structure would use a subordinate clause, in which case, the preposition "upon" would be used:

- (3) This is the base upon which Jane can build her equality.

¹⁴ This is fairly clear and as stated in the students' handbook. Error-free English is a B. A few minor errors is B-. More than a few would be in the C range and rather too many would be D range. There should be no failures, by definition (i.e. they shouldn't be taking our courses if they cannot communicate reasonably effectively in English). To score higher than a B, they need to be doing something interesting with the language, using some sophisticated rhetorical skills.

¹⁵ Note the an asterisk * before a sentence is the symbol used in linguistics to signal an incorrect construction.

This does not mean you should always try to use subordinate clauses. Sometimes a more simple syntactic structure works best:

(4) This is where Jane can base her equality.

When you are looking to write an essay within a certain word limit, the final construction is best. There are 11 words in #3 and only 8 in #4.

What about the link between syntax and meaning? Think about who is doing the “basing” – is it Jane or someone else? The passive construction seems to be weak in terms of the meaning of the sentence. Using the active voice of sentence #4 is putting the power of equality in Jane’s hands.

When you start to examine your language in terms such as these, you will start to be using language which might earn a grade higher than B.

Overall¹⁶

It is in this section that the essay as a whole is examined. Many different things will influence the grade here but they will be based on the AEAS grading scheme. For example, are topic sentences used for each paragraph? Is there cohesion throughout the essay? Is the argument appropriately made?

It is in this section that you would lose marks for using contractions. Do a search for apostrophes and make sure every instance is possessive and not a contraction. Have you spell-checked your essay? It is surprising how many students do not perform this simple task and I am often left to wonder why I should take the trouble to read an essay into which the writer has put so little effort. But spell-checking is not enough. It is possible to write a nonsense sentence which would pass a spell check. Spell-checking, for example, would not pick up the use of the wrong their/there. *Their is know substitute, of witch eye no, four the thyme kneaded two care fully proof reed you’re s a.*¹⁷

Another important skill to learn is hedging. If you say “It is clear that ...” you are leaving yourself open to debate. It might not be clear to your reader at all. A safer construction would be “It would seem that”

¹⁶ This is where you get to be subjective. Did you like the essay? Was it original? Did it hang together well? Were you ultimately persuaded by the argument? Would you recommend it to others? Does it stand out as exceptional (or at least in the top 10% of the class)? If you can honestly answer “yes” to *all* these questions, then give it an A- or A. If it’s truly exceptional, give it an A+. An essay which is solid, but which doesn’t have that special spark will be in the B range. Something which merely fulfils the criteria of an essay, but into which little effort has gone, should earn a C-range mark. If it was dull, and basically unsubstantiated, it will be a D-range essay. If it was plagiarised or totally off the mark, fail it. If the latter, offer a re-write (make sure your feedback is constructive and detailed). If there is plagiarism, but it’s of a minor nature, give them a chance to put in the proper acknowledgements — re-grade, then deduct 10%; even with correction, plagiarism remains a punishable offence, and even with a 10% deduction, they would be getting off lightly. If the plagiarism is more than minor, fail the devil!

¹⁷ There is no substitute, of which I know, for the time needed to carefully proofread your essay.

Although there are no marks awarded specifically for formatting, this is where an assessment of technical details would show up. If, for example, you use single spacing, or narrow margins into which your teacher can fit no comments, both things which will no doubt infuriate your teacher, you could well score a D in this section.

Whereas other sections in the grading scheme are as objective as they can be, given the subject of literature, this last section is more subjective – it is your teacher's chance to show displeasure at sloppy and careless work.