

Writing Guidelines for Mrs. Lee's Classes

Over the course of the year you will be required to write several essays and a research/term paper. Please make sure that whenever you are required to do writing exercises, whether they are short paragraphs, outlines for essays, longer essays, or even a term paper, you refer to this. It will be helpful for all of those writing assignments. A word about the philosophy of the course: **Writing** and **Critical Thinking** are the two most important skills you can take from this course. For many careers, it is critical to be able to communicate well through the written word. It is very important for this course as well.

FORMATS for ESSAYS

Helpful Hints:

- 1) Consider the question carefully - what is it really asking for?
- 2) Jot down some notes or a brief outline - good organization often leads to good responses.
- 3) After you are done, re-read your answer. Did you answer the question thoroughly and convincingly?

I. Introduction

- State your position on the issue or your argument – what is your thesis?
- Provide context and focus
- Clarity is essential

II. Body

- Identify your Evidence - *what, who, where?*
- Rationale and significance of Evidence - *why* is this important?
- Analysis - *how* does this tie back to my position/argument?

III. Conclusion

- Return to your original argument
- Tie up your evidence or summarize your major points
- Is your argument convincing? Did you do a good job proving it?

This format can be used effectively in a paragraph, an essay, or a long paper.

An easy way to remember if you have everything in there is through my BIG MAC analogy.



Remember that a good burger requires bread, meat and the “fix-ins.”

Length of Papers:

Students will often ask, "How long does it have to be? How many paragraphs? How many

words?" I do NOT want to hear these questions from you. I do not set lengths on the papers that you submit, except when it comes to the research paper and then I set minimum and maximum lengths. Other than that, I will always answer, "As long as it takes." Sometimes I will give you a recommended length, but you only need to follow that if you need a guideline.

Sometimes you will address a topic that requires a lot of material and other times it may be complex. Longer does not always equal better though. Often students think that if they just write a ton and include lots and lots of information, then that will make a good paper. They also think that simply working very hard to get lots of information will make a good paper. Sometimes the better papers are very tightly written and are not all that long. You need to learn to assess how much you need to write.

Do not judge if a paper is done simply by length. Look at the content. Is it written cleanly and clearly? (Think grammar and organization.) Does it flow well? (logic and transitions) Does it say what you want? (Content) Does it make the points you want to? (Introduction and Conclusion are particularly important with this step.) Can it be written more tightly and still do the job as well? (editing)

You can expect your papers to be graded on these above criteria.

Self-Evaluations of Papers

In terms of skills for life in general, beyond History and beyond school and beyond writing, the ability to evaluate one's own work or performance, assess what could be improved and work on those things is one of the most valuable skills in life. You will need this in whatever you do. Most of the time there will not be a supervisor, teacher, coach, or boss looking over your shoulder to tell you what you need to improve or even to tell you that you are doing a good job. The feeling that you have done a good job or that you need to improve certain things may only come from inside.

For many of the papers that you hand in, I will ask you to write a self-evaluation of the work that you do. Sometimes I will ask you to grade yourself as well. These are important for me because it helps me with your thought-process as a writer. The more you write, the better I, as your teacher, can understand you and the better teacher I can be. As a result, I expect you to write more than one or two quick sentences about your essay or term paper. I want a thoughtful self-evaluation that may be at least half a page. Think about what are the strengths of your paper. Where did you spend the most time? What sort of things have you tried to improve since the previous essay? Where do you think you could improve? Is there some artistry and flow to your writing, or is it just straightforward? Does the introduction work clearly? Does the conclusion emphasize the main ideas you want the reader to remember? How many drafts did you do? Did you have someone else read parts of it to help you? If you had more time, what would you work on to improve the paper? These sorts of questions should provide you with enough to write at least half a page single-spaced about your essay.



Equipment for Writing

There are several things that will help in terms of the writing process. If you have access to a computer and can easily use that, it would be a good idea. Save all your papers if you are writing them on a computer. They are helpful to look at later and see how much progress you have made.

Typing papers is not required for this class, not even for term papers, but ***legible handwriting*** is required for this class. Do whichever is easier and faster for you. Learning how to type is a tremendously valuable skill. I would recommend it anyway.

Resources: Have a dictionary and/or a thesaurus handy. They are invaluable tools for writing. A dictionary will also be useful for the things you read. Take the time and be disciplined about looking up words you don't understand. Writing takes discipline, just like athletics or music does. For those of you going to college, this will help expand your vocabulary for SAT's and other standardized tests. The hard work *will* pay off in the end.



Proofreading comments and code

There are several different symbols or code words I use when proofing a paper and it will help you to be familiar with the code below:

AWK: awkward. usually with phrasing that doesn't flow well or doesn't make much sense the way it is phrased.

WIC: word choice. There are better words than the one you chose. See your Thesaurus and it might help.

AGR.: agreement between subject and verb. Sometimes students have plural subjects and singular verbs.

punc.: any punctuation errors will simply be circled

sp.: spelling, usually appears above misspelled words

redundant: you've already said it enough, tighten your writing.

Mrs. Lee's Quick Rules for Writing



- 1) Avoid Using the First Person in formal essays
e.g. Do not say, "I think" . . . or "I feel"
Since you are writing the essay, your audience knows that you are the one doing the thinking or feeling. Leaving out the first person makes your essay stronger.
- 2) Do not use contractions.
i.e. "don't" = do not; "weren't" = were not
This is an informal form of writing. When you are writing a scholarly essay, you should write with a formal style, not an informal one.
- 3) Do not write the same way you speak. Do not use "colloquialisms" or in other words slang.
e.g. The Assyrians were a wicked strong empire.
Darius was the head honcho of the Persians.
- 4) Write with conviction. If you write like you are not convinced of what you are saying, then no one in your audience will be either.
- 5) Do not use the passive voice. The passive voice is a weaker form of writing and in general one should avoid it.
ie: Sam was hit by Ed. (Active voice would be: Ed hit Sam.)
- 6) Do not use the word "very"
It is a weak adverb. There are other, better, more unusual adverbs or better stronger verbs or adjectives you can use.
- 7) Use words that are full of meaning and speak well.
This is part of speaking with conviction and eloquence.
"devastated" vs. "feeling down and out"
"tremendous" vs. "a lot"
"morose" vs. "very sad"
"exhausted" vs. "very tired"
- 8) Make sure you understand the difference between "there" "their" and "they're"
their = possessive pronoun
there = referring to a place or used as an indefinite pronoun. "Over there"
they're = contraction of they are
- 9) **Double Space all** your essays. Essays that are not double-spaced will be returned ungraded and must be rewritten double-spacing them.