

USC Upstate Department of Languages, Literature, and Composition

Checklist for Writers: Did you remember to...

On the first page

- ❑ Capitalize your title, avoid quotes, underlines, or italics, and use a title that introduces your ideas.
- ❑ Use proper punctuation for the titles of your texts: quotes for short texts (including articles, short stories, individual poems, or chapters) and italics for book-length ones (including books, journals, plays, films, and collections of poetry). Use this punctuation consistently throughout the paper and on the works cited page.
- ❑ Put periods or commas inside the quotation marks around a title.
- ❑ Use the author's first and last name and title of the text you are analyzing in your introduction. Then use only the author's last name (never just first name) for the rest of the paper.
- ❑ Use present tense to describe the events that take place within the literary texts.
- ❑ Announce your main **argument** about how to **interpret** the text in a clear, specific thesis statement.

In the body paragraphs

- ❑ Use transitions and topic sentences that announce different parts of your overall thesis statement. Do not use plot summary for all of your transitions.
- ❑ Keep writing in present tense to describe events that take place in literature.
- ❑ Use narrator for prose and speaker for poetry.
- ❑ Avoid confusing the characters, narrators, or speakers, with the author, and avoid speculating about what the author felt or intended.
- ❑ Use evidence from the text through summary, description, quotation, and, most importantly, interpretation.
- ❑ Provide context about who said it and where it came from whenever you include a quote.
- ❑ Use signal phrases to avoid dropped or unattached quotations.
- ❑ Analyze and interpret the details of your quotes to show how they help you prove your thesis.
- ❑ Show why it matters that you interpret the text this way when you conclude your paper—does it change the way we see the author's work, the genre, the literary period, the literary movement, the literature of that place, the literature of that culture, the theme, the understanding of how language works, or a particular cultural or theoretical issue represented in the text?

Around your quotes

- ❑ Use page numbers (prose), line numbers (poems), and act.scene.line numbers (plays) in parentheses for your quotes when you include evidence from the text.
- ❑ Put the in-text citation of page/line numbers in parentheses OUTSIDE of your quotation marks, but INSIDE your period or comma.
- ❑ Indicate line breaks or stanza breaks in poetry with slashes.
- ❑ Double-space your block quotes for five+ lines of prose and four+ lines of poetry.
- ❑ Add a one-inch indent of the left margin for block quotes.
- ❑ Put the parentheses containing an in-text citation on the outside of punctuation in block quotes.
- ❑ Use spaces around the periods in your ellipses . . . to show you omitted part of the text.
- ❑ Use brackets if you need to change the grammar in a quote or to clarify a name or place.
- ❑ Cite any secondary sources in MLA Style (<http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/>).

Developed by Dr. Celena E. Kusch, USC Upstate, © 2009

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 United States License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/us/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.