

# Technical Details & Academic Work

## 1. THE CORRECT VOICE:

A critical essay is an argument. "I" should never be used in critical writing; instead, write objectively as if your opinion is clearly the only correct one. "You," "your," and "you're" should also never be written. You may use "the reader," "us," and "we" when discussing the audience's response to the novel.

## 2. THE CORRECT TONE:

Critical writing is formal writing. Your essays should not sound like you're talking to your friends in the hallway. Use the best vocabulary you can without looking up words in a thesaurus, and remember that clarity is the most important part in formulating a sound argument (See? That last part sounded smart!)

EX. "*Iago isn't a really nice guy and he does a lot of mean stuff.*" – not impressive

\*"*Iago isn't a particularly kind character; he is responsible for a lot of cruelty and deceit.*" = smart\*

## 3. THE CORRECT VERB TENSE:

A critical essay is a discussion of a text. Use the present tense in your writing.

EX. Victor made a monster who looked very frightening. = past tense = incorrect!

Victor is making a monster who is looking very frightening. – present progressive tense = incorrect!

\*Victor makes a monster who looks very frightening. = present tense = correct!\*

## 4. A CREATIVE TITLE:

This is pretty self-explanatory. Your title should be a brief description of your topic.

EX. "The Othello Essay" = *not* a creative title...in fact, it is boring and uninspired

\*"Til Death Do Us Part: Marriage and Murder in *Othello*" = creative and clever!\*

## 5. THE OPENING PARAGRAPH:

You must begin with a thought-provoking opening sentence or two that specifically introduces your topic, as well as a mention of the novel's title and author. The opening paragraph should conclude with your thesis statement (the point of your essay), which is arguable and specific to the text. This is the difference between a book report and a critical essay. **Write your thesis statement in bold font.**

## 6. HOW TO CORRECTLY WRITE TITLES:

For a novel or a play: underline the title

For a film: *italicize* the title

For an essay: put the title in "quotation marks"

## 7. THE BODY PARAGRAPHS:

Each body paragraph must support and prove your thesis statement. As you write, keep checking your thesis statement (written in **bold font**) to make sure that you're on track and haven't wandered off somewhere into another topic entirely. Each body paragraph must also include at least one relevant quotation and analysis of the quotation to support your point.

## 8. HOW TO CORRECTLY QUOTE:

Quotations must be prefaced with speaker and/or context, not "it is said that..." Quotations should not stand alone as their own sentence. There are three ways to correctly quote within your essay:

### A. Use a comma

When Victor meets the Monster again, he proclaims [ ] "Devil, do you dare approach me?"

### B. Use a colon

Victor is horrified by his creation [ : ] "His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath."

### C. Use no punctuation to make a seamless transition and a natural sentence

Victor describes his family as [ ] "one of the most distinguished" in all of Geneva.

## 9. HOW TO CORRECTLY CITE THOSE QUOTATIONS:

If you are citing from a novel, then the format is: (Author's last name page #)

EX. Victor is horrified by his creation: "His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath." (Shelley 39)

If you are citing from a play, then the format is: (Author's last name Act #: Scene #, line #s)

EX. When speaking with Iago, Cassio describes Desdemona as "a most fresh and delicate creature."

(Shakespeare 2:3, 20)

**10. WHERE TO PUT YOUR PUNCTUATION WHEN YOU USE QUOTATIONS:**

Punctuation can go either at the end of the quotation BEFORE the quotation marks or AFTER the parenthetical citation. Whichever one you choose must be the way that you punctuate throughout your essay. Quotations marks open and close the material being quoted, NOT the entire sentence.

EX. Roderigo is so upset that Desdemona doesn't love him that he proclaims, "I will incontinently drown myself." (Shakespeare 1:3, 305) = correct!

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EX. Roderigo is so upset that Desdemona doesn't love him that he proclaims, "I will incontinently drown myself.(Shakespeare 1:3, 305)" = wrong, wrong, wrong!

**11. MAKE SURE TO ANALYZE YOUR QUOTATIONS:**

Do not end a paragraph with a quotation. If you do this, it means that you haven't analyzed your quotation. All paragraphs should end with your own insights, usually several sentences long.

**12. THE CONCLUSION:**

The conclusion should be a final parting shot or insight about your topic. DO NOT copy and paste your opening paragraph in as your conclusion. DO NOT rehash or repeat what you have already written. DO NOT suddenly have a brand new insight about something that would require another paragraph of explanation and analysis. Instead, what final, brilliant point do you want to leave your audience with about your argument? Make a lasting impact on your reader.

**13. THE WORKS CITED:**

This is an absolutely necessary component to all critical writing. You must have a Works Cited at the end of every critical essay, even if you only cite from one text.

--The Works Cited should immediately follow your conclusion.

--Your sources should not be numbered.

--Your sources must be alphabetized.

--"The" in the title does not count as part of the alphabetizing (see below)

--All lines but the first one must be indented (manually hit RETURN at the end of the first line, and then manually hit TAB to accomplish this, OR use the "Hanging Indent" function).

**WORKS CITED**

Bottomer, Phyllis Ferguson. "Happily Ever After?" So Odd A Mixture: Along the Autism Spectrum in Pride and Prejudice. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publications, 2007. 163-195.

"The Origin of a Myth: Mary Shelley's Novel, Frankenstein." FrankensteinFilms.com.  
<http://www.frankensteinfilms.com/> 3/27/09

*The Princess Bride*. Dir. Rob Reiner. Perf. Cary Elwes, Robin Wright, Chris Sarandon, Mandy Patinkin, Wallace Shawn, Andre the Giant, Christopher Guest. Act III Communications, 1987.

Shelley, Mary. Frankenstein. New York: Oxford World's Classics, 1998.

# Super Common Mistakes You Need to Avoid

## 1. ITS vs. IT'S

- its = possession ("The dog was chasing **its** tail.")
- it's = it is ("**It's** a shame that we have class tomorrow.")

## 2. THERE vs. THEY'RE vs. THEIR

- there = existence or location ("**There** is a two-headed cow over **there**!")
- they're = they are ("**They're** my two best friends.")
- their = possession ("They can't find **their** flip-flops.")

## 3. WHOSE vs. WHO'S

- whose = possession ("**Whose** baseball cap is this?")
- who's = who is/who has ("**Who's** there?" / "**Who's** been stealing all of my socks?")

## 4. WHO vs. THAT

- who = people ("The grandmother **who** stole the car had an extensive criminal record.")
- that = things ("The poem **that** she memorized was very long and complicated.")

## 5. WHO vs. WHOM

- who = the person who does the action ("You're the one **who** ran over my cat!")
- whom = the recipient of the action ("You're the one **whom** my cat scratched!")

## 6. LOSE vs. LOOSE

- lose = the opposite of win ("I hate watching you **lose**. It's just so depressing.")
- loose = the opposite of tight ("Since losing three hundred pounds, all of my clothing is **loose**.")

## 7. TO vs. TOO vs. TWO

- to = a preposition ("I'm going **to** earn an A on this test!")
- too = a synonym for "also" ("Really? I'm going to earn an A, **too**!")
- two = the number between one and three ("You **two** are both really confident about this test!")

## 8. BOOK vs. NOVEL

- book = the actual pieces of paper and binding that you hold in your hands ("I'm sorry—I left my **book** at home today. I'm a terrible, terrible student.")
- novel = the words and ideas within, which you discuss in class and in your critical writing ("In Goldman's **novel**, The Princess Bride, all kinds of wacky hijinks ensue!")

## 9. MOVIE vs. FILM

- in critical writing, always use the word "**film**"—it's the correct term in academic writing

## 10. QUOTE vs. QUOTATION

- quote = the verb ("It is necessary to **quote** in your essays.")
- quotation = the words within the quotation marks ("The above **quotation** proves our protagonist is a liar.")

## 11. UNNECESSARY SPELLING AND GRAMMATICAL ERRORS

--Quite often, students will make a variety of errors that the computer can't fix. Don't rely on the computer to check your spelling and grammar for you! The most common (and most embarrassing) errors involve the names of authors and characters. These mistakes are unforgivable, since all you have to do is check the story in order to get the correct spelling. Don't be lazy; make sure you leave enough time to proofread all of your essays. Each essay should be your very best work, as well as a piece of writing that you're proud of; an essay full of sloppy errors is a quick indication that I'm taking a lot of time correcting and responding to something that *you didn't spend enough time on*, and I'll definitely be able to pick up on this.