English Department Writing Guide

WRITING GOOD PROSE, prose that is clear, subtle, and energetic – whether for intellectual, creative, or journalistic purposes – is difficult. It is a skill acquired by much practice and care. This guide helps you in two respects. It deals (a) with issues of grammar, syntax, and punctuation, and (b) with what is called 'style', i.e. the conventions of professional writing and referencing. Your lecturers will advise you on these matters on a module-by-module basis, so don't feel you need to know all this straight away. Gradually, however, do assimilate more of this material. To be a professional-level writer is a great skill for the workplace in a wide range of fields. *Few* write good prose: it is a skill, *habitus*, or 'craft' (as Richard Sennett would say).

Contents

1 RECOMMENDED WORKS

1.1 GRAMMAR, SYNTAX, PUNCTUATION

For grammar, syntax, and punctuation, we recommend the following books or websites (the books are in the library):

Improve Your Writing – Grammar Exercises – University of Bristol at
http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/exercises/grammar/grammar_tutorial/index.htm

Section G. 'Exercises' is particularly good: try its quizzes on the colon, semicolon, and the comma splice.

Diane Collinson, et al, *Plain English* (2nd edition, Open UP, 1992). Chapter 2 is particularly good for issues of punctuation.

William Strunk and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* (4th edition, or 50th anniversary edition, 1999/2009), the famous basic text on clear prose.

Noah Lukeman, *The Art of Punctuation* (OUP, 2006). Though apparently about punctuation in 'creative writing', this is an excellent guide to punctuation overall – a very useful book.

Claire Kehrwald Cook, *Line by Line: How to Edit Your Own Writing* (1985; Elsevier Science, 2006). This is one of the finest books ever written about prose style, but it is pitched at a high level. Its section on grammar is particularly helpful.

1.2 STYLISTIC CONVENTIONS

For the conventions of professional writing and referencing, we recommend you look first at the section on Referencing below (section 10), but then, for more detail, at parts of the following, also available in the library. These books don't just cover 'style'.

MHRA Style Guide: A Handbook for Authors and Editors (3rd edition, Modern Humanities Research Association, 2013). This is the work we recommend you use to style coursework essays and Dissertations in English literature: i.e. how to do footnote references, bibliographies, etc. It is easy to get hard copy, but it is available online free at http://www.mhra.org.uk/pdf/MHRA-Style-Guide-3rd-Edn.pdf The section at the start, 'A Quick Guide to MHRA Style', gives you most of what you need to know.

R. M. Ritter, *New Hart's Rules: the handbook of style for writers and editors* (OUP, 2005). This is a famous guide indeed. It is an abbreviated form of R. M. Ritter, *The Oxford Guide to Style* (OUP, 2002).

MLA Handbook, ed. Joseph Gibaldi (Modern Language Association of America, 2016). This is now in its 8th edition, but earlier editions are fine. While this is a different style system to MHRA, this book does have interesting sections on plagiarism, punctuation, etc.

1.3 HIGH-LEVEL WORKS

For those who aspire to understand the high end of writing and editing, in publishing contexts, there are two other invaluable books. If you have ever wondered the best way to write that novelist's name in English – whether Dostoevsky, Dostoevski, Dostoevskij, Dostoevskii, Dostoyevsky, Dostoyevski, Dostoyevskij, Dostoyevskii – these books tell you the answer. They also solve issues of hyphenation: e.g. whether to write death bed, death-bed, or deathbed. The *Guardian Style Guide* – available free on the web – is also good for these things, if less comprehensive.

New Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors: The Essential A–Z Guide to the Written Word, 2nd edition, ed. R. M. Ritter (Oxford, 2005)

New Oxford Spelling Dictionary: The Writers' and Editors' Guide to Spelling and Word Division, 1st edition, ed. Maurice Waite (Oxford, 2005)

2 SPELLING

Spell accurately at all times. In all professional publishing contexts, incorrect spelling looks very bad and makes you appear naïve or incompetent. You need to train yourself to get spellings right. Write your essays with a dictionary on your desk, and check any meanings and spellings you are unsure of.

In Word, use the Spell Check, i.e. when a word is underlined in red, it is probably wrongly spelt. Note, however, that there are quite a number of spellings that are different between **American English** and **British English** (color/colour, etc.). Make sure your Spell Check is set for British English: click **Tools** > **Language**, then select **English (UK)**. If you find yourself in America, spell accordingly.

If you check words using a dictionary and/or the Spell Check, gradually the number of words you spell confidently and accurately will increase. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* is excellent. A fuller, excellent dictionary is *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* (*NODE*) – there is a copy in the reference section of the library. Another good dictionary is *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*: this is a big, two-volume dictionary, and is good on the meanings of words in previous centuries. For checking or understanding the meaning of words in older plays or novels, scholars use the full *Oxford English Dictionary*, which is in 26 volumes. You will find a copy of this in the library reference section. This dictionary is the greatest and fullest historical dictionary in any language. It is referred to in abbreviated form as *OED*. You should use and explore it from time to time.

A good writer is someone fascinated by words and the way they work. Be sure you *really* understand the meanings of the words you use. Good writers are usually careful to understand the definitions of words and their correct use. The *Collins Cobuild Dictionary of the English Language* and the *Oxford Learners' Dictionary* are good for second-language speakers. Different dictionaries have different strengths.

Remember that English has changed substantively as a language over the centuries of its existence. This change is most radical between the eighth and the fifteenth centuries, but it continues at a slower pace from early modern English (Shakespeare's English) to the present day. The meaning of a word in the seventeenth century may in some cases be different from the meaning of that word today. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* gives you the contemporary meaning of words. For the historical meaning of a word, you need to use something fuller, like *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* or the full *OED.*

3 PUNCTUATION

3.1 GENERAL

Even some professional writers are hesitant about punctuation, so don't feel ashamed if you don't know how to use accurately the **comma** (,), the **semicolon** (;), the **colon** (:), and the **full stop** (.), or **parenthetical dashes**, (– . . . –) and **exclamation marks** (!). But *now* is the time to learn. The *Grammar Exercises – University of Bristol* (as recommended in 1.1) are a great place to start.

If you are unsure about punctuation, please study one of the following: *Plain English* by Diane Collinson *et al*. (Buckingham: OU Press, 1992), chapter 2; the section on punctuation in Claire Kehrwald Cook, *Line by Line: How to Edit Your Own Writing* (1985; Elsevier Science, 2006); or the section called 'The Mechanics of Writing' in *MLA Handbook,* all in the library. In Collinson, for example, work through the examples, and check your answers. You will find many works advising on punctuation in the English Language section of the library. Browse this section, and make sure you gradually understand the correct use of the different points.

Also, when reading, *notice how others use punctuation*. Imitate their example. Semicolon and colon cause most confusion. They are useful and you should get used to deploying them properly.

3.2 SEMICOLON (;)

You can usually only really put a semicolon in a place where you could also put a full stop: it needs to come at the end of a whole phrase or sentence. What makes it different to the full stop is that it indicates that the two sentence-units are part of one larger unit of meaning. In other words, it is less emphatic than a full stop. Here is a simple example of its use:

The cat sat on the mat; its fur was black. If you write

The cat sat on the mat, and its fur was black. . . . it sounds bland.

As Lukeman notes in *The Art of Punctuation* (see 1.1 above), this is the primary function of the semicolon: 'to connect two complete (thematically similar) sentences, thereby making them one'. The semicolon has many subtle uses though. For example, Lukeman again: 'The semicolon can enhance word economy, since its appearance often allows surrounding words to be cut'. **Example**:

She couldn't dance in her favourite ballroom because it was being renovated.

She couldn't dance in her favourite ballroom; it was being renovated.

3.3 COLON (:)

As Ritter explains, 'The colon points forward: from a premise to a conclusion, from a cause to an effect, from an introduction to a main point, from a general statement to an example'. **Example:**

The weather grew worse: we decided to leave the beach.

The colon is used in the following ways:

- To introduce a sentence or phrase that explains, illustrates, or amplifies what has come before. It is a kind of pointer > pointing the reader to what comes next. **Example:**

  Scene 7 of the play is clearly an addition: it lacks both the authority and style of the scenes that surround it.

- The colon can also be used to introduce a list or series. **Examples:**

  There are three ways of cooking eggs: boiling, scrambling, and frying. I like scrambled eggs best.

  Three different playwrights have been suggested as the author: Shakespeare, Beaumont, and Webster.

- The third main use of the colon is to introduce quotations, either short quotations within your sentence or longer **displayed** or **block quotations** (see section 6). By and large, you should only use a colon where you could use a full stop – it needs to come at a complete pause in the rhythm of the sentence – but again its function is to point the reader onwards and

to draw attention to the words that follow. **Examples:**

Everyone knows Hamlet's most famous line: 'To be or not to be, that is the question'.

Frank Kermode's understanding of *Hamlet* can best be summarised by what he says at the beginning of chapter 3: 'Those who argue for oedipal readings need to clarify their overall viewpoint'.

- **BUT**, in a different phrasing – without the full pause – you do not need the colon. **Examples:**

  Everyone knows Hamlet's most famous line is 'To be or not to be, that is the question'.

  Frank Kermode has argued that 'those who argue for oedipal readings need to clarify their overall viewpoint'.

- One last, but rare, use of the colon, is to direct attention to a word or phrase in apposition to another. This is an emphatic use and should be used sparingly. **Example:**

  He had only one pleasure: eating.

3.4 EXCLAMATION MARK (!)

In critical and analytical prose, be wary of using exclamation marks at all. (It is a different matter when writing fiction, where you need exclamation marks to indicate emphases in characters' speech.) In literary-critical contexts exclamation marks are now almost never deployed; in most serious works they are rare. Even in more popular discursive contexts, nothing betrays the jejune writer more obviously than the tendency to overuse the exclamation mark. No less an authority than the great Theodor Adorno says this:

Exclamation points, gestures of authority with which the writer tries to impose an emphasis external to the matter itself, have become intolerable, while the *sforzato,* the musical counterpart of the exclamation point, is as indispensable today as it was in Beethoven's time, when it marked the incursion of the subjective will into the musical fabric. Exclamation points, however, have degenerated into usurpers of authority, assertions of importance. (*Notes to Literature*)

So, you have been warned!

3.5 PARENTHESIS BRACKETS AND DOUBLE DASHES: ( ) – –

Double dashes are slower, but more emphatic, than parenthesis brackets. Lukeman gives this good example:

Clocks made in Switzerland (particularly in Geneva) never break.

Clocks made in Switzerland – particularly in Geneva – never break.

As he aptly puts it, 'it is the difference between a driver who politely interrupts you to point out a sight along the way and a driver who slams on the brakes'. But double dashes certainly have their uses: don't be afraid of them. Theodor Adorno makes these interesting points:

The test of a writer's sensitivity in punctuating is the way he or she handles parenthetical material. The cautious writer will tend to place that material between dashes and not in round brackets, for brackets take the parenthesis completely out of the sentence, creating enclaves, as it were, whereas nothing in good prose should be unnecessary to the overall structure. But admitting such superfluousness, brackets implicitly renounce the claim to the integrity of the linguistic form and capitulate to pedantic philistinism. Dashes, in contrast, which block off the parenthetical material from the flow of the sentence without shutting it up in a prison, capture both connection and detachment. But just as blind trust in their power to do so would be illusory, in that it would expect of a mere device something that only language and subject-matter can accomplish, so the choice between dashes and brackets helps us to see how inadequate abstract norms of punctuation are. (*Notes to Literature*)

For the other, more standard punctuation marks, see some of the works suggested in Section 1.

4 PARAGRAPHS

Use paragraphs. If you have written a whole page without a paragraph-break, look for where to put one. Paragraphs break up your argument and give it clarity. They refresh the reader, giving her or him a new start, emphasizing you are commencing a new point or idea, a new phase of your thinking.

In typing, you put in a paragraph-break by using the **Enter key** (on the right-hand side of the keyboard), and then, to indent, the short space or **Tab** key (on the left-hand side of the keyboard, with little arrows pointing both ways). This indents the first line of the paragraph you are working on – as at the beginning of this paragraph. An alternative procedure is not to indent, but to set off the whole block of each paragraph by using the **Enter key** (on the right-hand side of the keyboard), i.e. to leave a whole clear line between two paragraphs. If you look back in this guide, **section 2) Spelling** shows you the first method, and, looking forwards, **section 6) Referring to Critics** shows you the second. **Examples:**

need to clarify their overall viewpoint.'

Elsewhere in his writings, Kermode also examines . . .

Or

need to clarify their overall viewpoint.'

Elsewhere in his writings, Kermode also examines . . .

The first method is preferable. You will notice that the standard tab indent on Word is quite large. You can reduce it, by blocking text, and then **Format** > **Paragraph**, **Special:** 'First line', **By:** set 0·5 cm.

5 TYPING YOUR WORK

All coursework assignments and essays must be typed (unless the tutor indicates otherwise). This gives a far more professional appearance, and universities insist on it. It is a skill going forward. All professionally published material has to go to press in typed form. Careers in all kinds of areas (teaching, print media, publishing, etc.) will now expect you to write on computer, so if you haven't done this before, *now* is the time to start. Coursework will normally be submitted via the VLE (Moodle) as a Word document. It should be in a sensible font and size: see **5.6**.

5.1 DOUBLE SPACING.

Always double space your work, as in this paragraph. There is one main reason for this. All material submitted for publication to publishers, journals, etc. is at first double-spaced. This leaves space for an editor to suggest improvements or corrections to your work. Because this is the familiar form, it also looks more professional. It may at first look strange to your eye, but it is very much the usual format for submitting material to publishers. Examiners prefer it. Block your text; then, in Word, **Format** > **Paragraph** > **Line spacing** > **Double.**

5.2 SPACING

When typing material, leave an ordinary space after all main points of punctuation, commas, full stops, semicolons, and colons.Don't do what I have just done.Do you see how crushed up it appears? This is the way to do it!

5.3 PAGE NUMBERS.

Please put page numbers in your essays. Even if stapled, pages can become loose. Page numbers allow your reader to get the essay in the right order.

5.4 DIACRITICAL MARKS AND SYMBOLS

e.g. á è % $, etc. can usefully be found on the **Insert** menu**,** at **Symbol.**

5.5 EXPLORING 'Word'.

Explore Word to discover more of the ways in which your material can be professionally presented. The **Page Layout** menu and other features lets you adjust many aspects of spacing and paragraphing for a professional appearance.

5.6 DO NOT USE UNUSUAL OR NON-STANDARD FONTS

Use only the most normal fonts: Times New Roman, the most standard, is excellent. Garamond, Georgia, Arial, and Century are all sensible fonts, set at 11 or 12. There are no marks for using 'clever' or fancy fonts. They are inappropriate and distracting in the context of a formal essay.

6 REFERRING TO CRITICS

It is crucial that this section be read along with section 7 on **PLAGIARISM,** and in conjunction with the departmental *Handbook*, section 3. (This is available on the department webpage.)

6.1 GENERAL

A good essay, on literature, language, or indeed any other subject, will usually have some reference to critics or experts. To refer to critics is not 'unoriginal'. It shows your learning, the breadth of your reading, and how you are participating in contemporary debate about a given matter or a given work of literature. It always gives your essay a more professional feel, and – unless used in a silly way – *it will always increase your mark or grade*. ('Originality', as it is sometimes referred to, is a silly idea. You are original whether you like it or not, from your genes and spirit in the womb!)

Referring to critics shows you have risen above a false individualism: that you value or appreciate the views and ideas of others, that you are in conversation with other people's ideas. In all serious areas of study – theology, philosophy, politics, economics, the arts, etc. – showing your awareness of ongoing debate is part of your growth in understanding within the subject.

6.2 WAYS OF REFERRING TO CRITICS

There are three main ways you can refer to the work of a critic you have read. To illustrate them, we have chosen a passage from an essay by Michael Gearin-Tosh

on *Macbeth*. The essay is 'The Treatment of Evil in *Macbeth*' (and it can be found in *Critical Essays on Macbeth*, ed. by L. Cookson and B. Loughrey, Longman, 1988). Here is the extract:

> Macbeth is evil, yet pity is essential to tragedy. Two ways in which Shakespeare reconciles these opposites so that we pity a 'hellhound' (V. 6. 42) are the use of soliloquy and the strategies of the last two acts.
>
> *Macbeth* contains more soliloquy as a proportion of the play than any other drama by Shakespeare. Soliloquy can create intimacy with those we do not like, as it does in Shakespeare's other tragedy whose hero is evil, *Richard III*, which was written some fifteen years before *Macbeth*. Richard is also called a 'hellhound' (IV. 4. 48) but he is a 'hellhound' from the start. He declares his villainy in the soliloquy which opens the play and we soon learn that he has already moved against his first victim in the play, his brother Clarence. Macbeth *becomes* evil, and his soliloquies chart the stages of this degeneration.

This passage makes some important points about *Macbeth*. Let us imagine that, having read it, you wanted to refer to some of these points in your own essay. There are three main ways of going so.

■ **PARAPHRASE**. You can name Michael Gearin-Tosh (or whoever is the critic concerned) and then put his arguments into your own words. **Example:**

Michael Gearin-Tosh notes that there is more soliloquy in *Macbeth*, as a percentage of the play, than in any of Shakespeare's major tragedies. As Gearin-Tosh argues, Shakespeare uses soliloquy – our overhearing of the protagonist's inner thoughts – to create intimacy between the audience and Macbeth.[3] Even if we sense Macbeth's evil, it draws us nearer to the inner workings of his mind.

Note, as here, you still need a footnote reference. In using paraphrase you need to be careful not to plagiarize inadvertently (see Handbook, section 3, and also the section on plagiarism below).

■ **SHORT QUOTATION**. When a particular phrase or sentence by a critic strikes you as interesting, make a note of it in your notebook or computer, so that you can use it in an essay. Sometimes short quotation may be just a vivid phrase, sometimes it may be something a little longer. The quotation can be **run-on** or **embedded** in your text. Such quotation will always improve your essay, giving lift and impact. **Example:**

Shakespeare's use of the soliloquy has always seemed crucial to the effect of *Macbeth*. As Gearin-Tosh says, 'Soliloquy can create intimacy with those we do not like'.[3] Macbeth is certainly someone we come to dislike in an obvious sense: he enters more and more into a world of evil, into moral depravity. But soliloquy gives us access to his inner thoughts, and in this way keeps us near to him. Gearin-Tosh contrasts Macbeth with Shakespeare's earlier evil protagonist Richard III: 'Macbeth *becomes* evil, and his soliloquies chart the stages of this degeneration'.[4]

■ **LONG QUOTATION.** Sometimes it is appropriate to give a longer quotation from a critic. Obviously, this cannot be done too often, otherwise your essay will become a mere patchwork of long quotations. Your own argument, your voice, will be missing. Nonetheless, occasionally, it can be a useful tool. It is best to quote a longer passage when you find that it helps to build up your larger argument. Either it helps you to illustrate what you have already said, or it helps you to go on and build your own argument.

When you quote a passage that makes a longer quotation – more than about 50 words, say, or three or four lines – you should set it as a **displayed or block quotation.** So, leave a clear, empty line between the end of your sentence and the start of the quotation, and also inset the quotation from the margin. This imitates the format in most books. In Word, to inset a quotation in this way – whether from critic, play, poem, etc.– you should **block** the text concerned, and use the **Increase Indent** (or **Decrease Indent**), on the **Home** menu, in the top row of tools, in the middle. Here is an extract from an essay with a **displayed quotation** in the middle of it. **Example:**

Shakespeare has to keep the audience in some kind of sympathy with Macbeth, and his main strategy for doing so is his use of soliloquy. Gearin-Tosh has emphasized the importance of soliloquy, and in so doing, noted an important difference between *Macbeth* and *Richard III*:

> *Macbeth* contains more soliloquy as a proportion of the play than any other drama by Shakespeare. Soliloquy can create intimacy with those we do not like, as it does in Shakespeare's other tragedy whose hero is evil, *Richard III* . . . he [Richard] is a 'hellhound' (4. 4. 48) from the start. . . . Macbeth *becomes* evil, and his soliloquies chart the stages of this degeneration.[3]

Gearin-Tosh raises a number of important points here, and I want to take some of them further. First, there is the interesting contrast between *Macbeth* (1606) and the earlier play *Richard III* (1593). Second, there is the interesting point that. . . [and so your argument takes off from there].

7 PLAGIARISM

If you follow the advice in **section 6** above, you will not have to worry about plagiarism. It is good to refer to and to quote other people's ideas. Plagiarism, however, is when you take other people's words and ideas and then pretend they are your own, *by not distinguishing clearly between your own words and words you have borrowed*. It is basically a form of stealing, only you are stealing other people's words (rather than stealing their things): you are not acknowledging the source of your ideas or your words. For more detail on plagiarism, please see the departmental

Handbook, section 3 (in particular the quiz), and also the *MLA Handbook,* the section 'Plagiarism and Academic Integrity'. Here is a definition of plagiarism:

> Plagiarism may take the form of repeating another's sentences as your own, adopting a particularly apt phrase as your own, paraphrasing someone else's argument as your own, or even presenting someone else's line of thinking in the development of a thesis as though it were your own. In short, to plagiarize is to give the impression that you have written or thought something that you have in fact borrowed from another person. Although a writer may often use another person's words and thoughts, they *must be acknowledged* as such.

The following example is intended to show clearly what plagiarism is and what it is not. It refers to the passage of criticism already quoted at the beginning of section 6.2.

THIS IS NOT PLAGIARISM:

> Shakespeare's use of the soliloquy has always seemed crucial to the effect of *Macbeth*. As Gearin-Tosh says, 'Soliloquy can create intimacy with those we do not like'.[3] Macbeth is certainly someone we come to dislike in an obvious sense: he enters more and more into a world of evil, into moral depravity. But soliloquy gives us access to his inner thoughts, and in this way keeps us near to him. Gearin-Tosh contrasts Macbeth with Shakespeare's earlier evil protagonist Richard III: Richard starts off as evil, but 'Macbeth *becomes* evil, and his soliloquies chart the stages of this degeneration'.[4]

THIS *IS* PLAGIARISM:

> Shakespeare's use of soliloquy has always seemed crucial to the effect of *Macbeth*. Soliloquy can help to create a feeling of intimacy with characters we do not like. Macbeth is certainly someone we come to dislike in an obvious sense: he enters more and more into a world of evil, into moral depravity. But soliloquy gives us access to his inner thoughts, and in this way keeps us near to him. Macbeth can be contrasted in an interesting way with Shakespeare's earlier evil protagonist Richard III, but unlike Richard, Macbeth *becomes* evil, and his soliloquies chart the stages of this degeneration.

In this second passage, there is no indication whatsoever that some of the thoughts and phrases come from the critic Gearin-Tosh. Two of the sentences derive *directly* from Gearin-Tosh's essay, but his name is not mentioned: there are no quotation marks, and there is no attempt to reference these sentences. Even though the phrasing of these sentences is slightly altered from the original, this still counts as plagiarism. When in doubt, always mention your source or the critic's name, using phrases like 'as Gearin-Tosh has argued . . .', 'Gearin-Tosh says that . . .', 'one critic has said that . . . ' and *giving a footnote reference*.

Plagiarism in a serious failure of integrity and honesty.

Here, as at other universities, an essay which is judged to contain plagiarism may be graded at 0%. (The university's full plagiarism policy is available on the web.) Don't worry about plagiarizing by accident. Simply be honest about where your ideas come from, and use quotation marks around material directly quoted from critics, internet sources, or any other material. The Turn-it-in programme easily identifies plagiarism, so please avoid it at all costs.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

8.1 GENERAL

Most coursework essays require bibliographies at the end. The bibliography should include the works you have directly referred to in your essay and also other works, which, though you have not directly referred to them, have nonetheless acted as background to your understanding of the subject. The books and articles you have used should be listed in alphabetical order by author's surname. The order of reference should be in a consistent form. We recommend the MHRA system, which works as follows, for books:

Author's surname, then first name or initials, *Title of work in italics* (place of publication: publisher, date)

And for articles in journals:

Author's surname, then first name or initials, 'Title of article' (in quotation marks), *Journal name*, volume number (year of publication), page range

8.2 MODEL BIBLIOGRAPHY

Here is a simple model Bibliography for a coursework essay on F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*. It shows you how to refer to (a) a main edition you have used, (b) an essay in a collection of essays, (c) an article in a journal, and (d) three ordinary books.

Bibliography

All in-text references are to *The Great Gatsby*, ed. by M. J. Bruccoli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

Garrett, George, 'Fire and Freshness: A Matter of Style in *The Great Gatsby*', in *New Essays on The Great Gatsby*, ed. by M. J. Bruccoli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)

Goldsmith, Meredith, 'White Skin, White Mark: Passing, Posing, and Performance in *The Great Gatsby*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 49 (2003), 440–49

Hook, Andrew, *F. Scott Fitzgerald* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992)

Lee, Brian, *American Fiction 1865–1940* (London: Longman, 1987)

Tredell, Nicolas, *Icon Critical Guides: The Great Gatsby* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 1997)

8.3 INTERNET SOURCES

In essays it is good to cite books and articles (as on JSTOR). Be wary of how you use and cite websites. Often they are not authoritative enough.

Internet sources are probably best given in the form recommended by *New Hart's Rules*, with the URL between pointers < >, or at least some approximation to this form. It is best to find an individual author to whom to attribute the web material, but if this is not possible, cite it by a title of some kind. Here are the examples given in *Hart's New Rules*:

Quint, Barbara, 'One Hour to Midnight: *Tasini* Oral Arguments at the Supreme Court', *Information Today* [online journal], 18/5 (May 2001) <http://www.infotoday.com/newbreaks/nb010330-1.htm> accessed 1 July 2001

[The] Bibliographical Society [website]<http://www.bibsoc.org.uk/>accessed 1 Oct 2004

9 QUOTING YOUR MAIN TEXT

When you are writing about a work of literature, you should always try to quote short extracts, phrases, or lines from it in order to illustrate your points and give substance to your argument. This section discusses how to do so.

9.1 QUOTING FROM POETRY

Poems are divided into lines, and how the lines are arranged – their lineation – is important to their rhythm and to how we voice them. When quoting poetry you need to make clear where the line-endings are. Remember that Shakespeare's plays, for example, are often written in poetry (i.e. blank verse) and, where this is the case, you again need to indicate the line-breaks, or set then out properly in a displayed or block quotation. Here are some simple examples showing how to quote properly from the poem 'Vergissmeinnicht' by Keith Douglas. Here is the fifth stanza as it looks in a book:

> But she would weep to see today
> how on his skin the swart flies move;
> the dust upon the paper eye
> and the burst stomach like a cave.

If you quote the whole of this stanza, the lines should appear as in the original book and also inset (as above). Unlike the book, however, they should be double spaced. When quoting and insetting poetry, you must keep the original lineation, as this is part of the poem's effect.

If you quote just two lines of this poem or any other poem, you can keep it within your own text, but you need to add in the oblique solidus, i.e. / , or vertical solidus, i.e. | , to indicate the line-ending. **Example:**

In the fifth stanza of the poem, Douglas heightens the alliteration and the linked vowels, suddenly raising the intensity of the language: 'But she would weep to see today / how on his skin the swart flies move' (17–18). 'Weep' catches up the sound of 'swart' in an unusual and beautiful way. [etc.]

If you are quoting more than two lines of the poem, you will need (as in quoting criticism) to leave a free line and then inset the quotation. *The line-breaks should appear as in the original*. After the quotation, you should leave another free line. In this way, the quotation is highlighted within the text. **Example:**

Douglas's poem moves to its climax in the fifth stanza, in which the language is heightened through alliteration and interlinked vowel sounds:

> But she would weep to see today
> how on his skin the swart flies move;
> the dust upon the paper eye
> and the burst stomach like a cave.
> (17–20)

Here the 'ee' sound in 'weep' and 'see' links the words together, but there are other heightening effects. [etc.]

9.2 QUOTING PROSE WRITINGS AND NOVELS

Here the same rules apply as for quoting criticism. You do not need, however, as with poetry, to reproduce the original lineation. If the quotation is fewer than about 50 words, or three or four lines, you can keep it in the body of your text. See the example in **6.2 Short quotation**. If it is longer than about 50 words, or three or four lines, it needs to be set as a **displayed** or **block quotation** (see **6.2 Long quotation**). Style systems are rightly vague about how many words long a quotation needs to be, to be treated as a block quotation. In other words, use your discretion, in relation to the material.

10 REFERENCING

10.1 GENERAL

When you start out, you are not expected to reference fully all your work. But, as soon as possible, you should attempt to get some idea of accurate referencing. In particular, coursework essays (when they count towards your final degree) should be properly referenced. (Referencing is not expected in exams.)

What does referencing mean? When you quote from a given text or critic, you give a reference to indicate the work and the page within the work. In this way, someone who wants to follow up your ideas can trace your quotations to their original sources and verify your argument.

We strongly recommend use of the MHRA system, but we briefly indicate here two other systems as well, so you can know about these by way of comparison. MHRA is very close to the Oxford University Press (OUP) system (i.e. *Hart's New* Rules). There are only small differences. Here is a brief explanation of each system. For the full versions, see the *MLA Handbook*, the *MHRA Style Guide* (3rd edn), and *Hart's New Rules* respectively. In **section 18**, at the end of this Guide, you will find model sample pages of essays styled correctly to the three systems.

10.2 MLA REFERENCING

In this system, when you quote from a source, after the quotation you simply put the author's name and the page number in brackets. So, let's imagine you have been reading parts of Nicholas Roe's *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (1988), to help you with an essay about the Romantic poets and politics. This is how you might quote and reference it:

In the early 1790s Wordsworth opposed the war with France, wanted the English monarchy abolished, and hated the suffering he saw among the ordinary people, but in the end, as the Revolution in France went bad, he developed from 'poet of protest to poet of human suffering' (Roe 137).

Or course, if you mention Roe's name within your own text, you don't then need to repeat his name in the bracketed reference. So:

In the early 1790s Wordsworth opposed the war with France, wanted the English monarchy abolished, and hated the suffering he saw among the ordinary people, but in the end, as Roe argues, he developed from 'poet of protest to poet of human suffering' (137).

In both instances – in all instances – the book must then be listed in your

Bibliography. Thus:

Roe, Nicholas, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford: OUP, 1988)

In the case of website material, where there is not one named author, use the title in a conveniently shortened form. So, after a quotation from the website listed in 8.3, the bracketed reference would simply be (*Bibliographical Society*).

10.3 MHRA REFERENCING

The MHRA system of referencing uses footnotes at the bottom of the relevant page, not bracketed references in your text. The footnote facility is available under the **References** menu in Word. So, the same example above, would now look like this:

In the early 1790s Wordsworth opposed the war with France, wanted the English monarchy abolished, and hated the suffering he saw among the ordinary people, but in the end, as the Revolution in France went bad, he developed from 'poet of protest to poet of human suffering'.[1]

See the footnote at the bottom of this page. If you refer to the same work again in your essay, the next footnote can be shorter, just giving the author's name and the page number. So, again, see the bottom of this page.[2] To see how to footnote an article, see the bottom of the page again.[3] You need the volume number and the year of publication. As the *MHRA Style Guide* says (1.3.10), 'Footnote numbers should be inserted following any punctuation except a dash, and at the end of the sentence if possible', i.e. the footnote number comes *after* a full stop and *after* a comma or semicolon, *not* before. (See the example above.)

Again, in this system, please also list the book or article in the Bibliography.

10.4 OUP (or *Hart's New Rules*) REFERENCING

The OUP, or *Hart's New Rules,* system, is basically the same as MHRA, though in this system you can get away with the minimum of information, if you want to, and avoid giving the publisher's name in your note, or the p. or pp. for page or pages. So, the footnote would just be:

[1] Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford, 1988), 137.

This is elegant in its simplicity.

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[1] Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 137.
[2] Roe, p. 178.
[3] J. C. Maxwell, 'Wordsworth and the Subjugation of Switzerland', *Modern Language Review*, 65 (1970), 16–18 (p. 17).

This is how to arrange the footnote for a journal article:

[1] J. C. Maxwell, 'Wordsworth and the Subjugation of Switzerland', *Modern Language Review*, 65 (1970), 17.

Again, in this system, please also list the book or article in the Bibliography.

For all these systems, please see the **model essay pages** at the end of this Guide.

In the Bibliographies, of course, you swap round the first name and surname, and take away the specific page reference – thus, in MHRA style:

Roe, Nicholas, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)

See **Section 8 Bibliography** for full details.

11 POINTS OF STYLE

11.1 QUOTATION MARKS, DOUBLE/SINGLE

Generally English style uses single quotation marks, ' ', while style systems in the USA use the older double quotation marks " ", but this is not universally true. UK print journalists often prefer double quotation marks, as they are used in the quality UK newspapers. Then again many people believe that single quotation marks are easier to read on the web. When writing about literature, we prefer you follow normal modern British practice, i.e. single quotation marks. When writing for journalism assignments, it is double for print, but please consult your tutors in relation to web writing.

When you quote someone else, and within the quotation they quote something, you can indicate this by then moving to double quotation marks. **Example:**

Hans Gubermatch says that Macbeth 'goes into something like madness with his soliloquy "Is this a dagger" ' as he approaches near to the point of the murder.

11.2 FIRST NAMES AND SURNAMES

The first time in an essay that you refer to a poet/novelist/dramatist you might choose to give both first and second names, e.g. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Robert Frost's 'Two Look at Two', Katherine Mansfield's 'At the Bay', or E. M. Forster's *A Room with a View.* But thereafter just use the surname. This is simpler and saves you and your reader time. It is unnecessary with well-known writers to use both names: William Shakespeare, John Keats, Charles Dickens . . . no . . . there is not a Maurice Shakespeare, Frederick Keats, or a Gary Dickens, so no confusion is likely!

11.3 AVOID NEEDLESS REPETITION

Don't overly repeat the name of the author or the title of a work (poem, play, novel) you are talking about. If you have begun a discussion of a given work, you don't need to keep using its name (*Macbeth* . . . *Macbeth* . . . *Macbeth*, or Dickens . . . Dickens . . . Dickens) unless your reader might have some reason to think that you have changed the subject and moved onto something else.

11.4 AVOID THE OBVIOUS

Do not waste sentences by saying the very obvious, particularly facts, unless these are relevant to your argument. Assume a sophisticated reader (which your external examiner, usually a Professor at another university, certainly is!) and not an alien newly arrived from Mars. So, do not begin an essay like this: '*Hamlet* is one of the group of Shakespeare's tragedies. It was probably written in 1600. It represents a marked change of atmosphere and style from the plays preceding it.' Cut the two sentences designed for the Martian, and get straight into the essentials of what you are saying – thus: '*Hamlet* (1600) represents a marked change of atmosphere and style from the plays preceding it. . . .'. And you are off!

11.5 CORRECT USE OF ITALICS

Set in italics the names of full-length published works: i.e. *Macbeth*, *Jane Eyre*, *Great Expectations.* In exams, indicate italics by underlining such titles: Macbeth, Jane Eyre, Great Expectations. This is the equivalent of italics in published material.

This traditional system has many advantages, notably clarity. But also, you don't have to say: 'Macbeth's character shows . . .' or 'In the play Macbeth . . .' because *Macbeth* [in italics] *always* means the play; Macbeth [without italics] *always* means the character within the play.

Short works (e.g. individual short poems, short stories, chapters of books, critical essays, etc.) are *not* in italics. They just take single quotation marks: 'Two Look at Two', 'Strange Meeting', 'The Birthday Party'. A whole volume of poems on the other hand (e.g. a complete longer work, published as such) *does* take italics. Again, this makes for accuracy and simplicity. Philip Larkin wrote a volume of poems called *Whitsun Weddings* – when written in italics like this, it indicates you are referring to the whole volume of poems. He also wrote an individual short title-poem to the volume called 'Whitsun Weddings'. The difference between italics (or underlining) and single quotation marks indicates immediately which you mean, without having to indicate this in any other way. So, also, with Katherine Mansfield: *The Garden-Party* indicates the whole volume of short stories of that name published in 1922; 'The Garden-Party' indicates the single short story within the volume from which the volume takes its title.

There is a short poem by Robert Frost called 'Two Look at Two'. Because it is a short poem (part of a larger volume) it should be as here, in single quotation marks. For titles of works *never* use italics and quotation marks together. It is one or the other. Do *not* write *'Two Look at Two'*.

11.6 SOME POINTS ABOUT NUMBERS

In writing about a novel refer to chapter 2, not chapter two. In writing about a play, in an ordinary sentence (not a reference), it is now most common to use arabic (not roman) numbers: i.e. in Act 1, in Act 2, in Act 3, etc. In references, after quotations, use the form (4. 3. 120-25), meaning Act 4, scene 3, lines 120 to 125. When, in your ordinary sentences, you refer to an Act and a scene within it, you can use the form 'in 4. 3' or 'in Act 4, scene 3'. Don't, however, write 'in Act four, Scene three', which is cumbersome. Use *numbers not words* for line numbers in poems. So, write 'In lines 20–25 of the poem . . .' rather than 'in lines twenty to twenty-five . . .'. Ages, as adjectives, are now usually done with a combination of numbers and words, e.g. 'We do not know much about the 19-year-old Shakespeare.'

11.7 DATES

English and American forms for historical dates are usually different, and there is a variety of English forms. Generally, we would recommend the use of the form preferred by OUP and *The Guardian*, i.e. 2 October 1960 (day, month year). In other words, you don't put in the 'nd' on '2nd' or 'of' (as in 2nd of October 1960). You should be aware of other forms preferred in England and the US. So, you should write, for example

Shakespeare was born on 26 April 1564.

In the US, this would characteristically be Shakespeare was born on April 26, 1564.

Do NOT, however, write any of the following:

Shakespeare was born on the 26th April 1564.
Shakespeare was born on 26th of April 1564.

12 FURTHER POINTS

12.1 'VERY'

Avoid the use of *very*. It is overused. Its effect is an emotive insistence on the statement being made, which is usually a cover for the relative absence of accuracy or rationality. Everything is *very* interesting, *very* striking, *very* difficult, etc., and in the end this becomes very, very boring indeed.

12.2 REDUNDANT WORDS

It is not necessary to write: 'John Smith, in [his book] *Shakespeare's Tragedies*, . . .' or 'Milton, in [his poem] 'Lycidas'. . .', Blake, in [his poem] 'Jerusalem' . . .' or 'Charles Dickens in [his famous novel] *Great Expectations* . . .'. The words in brackets in these sentences are redundant, in the first instance because the italics or quotation marks indicate that these are books or poems, and also because you should assume an educated reader who knows this information.

12.3 REDUNDANT PHRASES

Another overused phrase is 'It is very interesting to note that . . .' and similar phrases. The phrase is redundant, and creates an unnecessary feeling of insistence. So, observe the following sentence with and without the phrase: '[It is very interesting to notice how] Hardy sets himself against the loud noises of public discourse, deliberately creating in his poems a private space of intense feeling that challenges the hollowness of large formulas and overblown publicity.' The opening phrase adds nothing to the sentence and should be dropped.

12.4 SIGNPOSTING

Avoid backward and forward signposts: 'as I argued above', 'as I said at the beginning of this essay', 'as we have already said', 'as I will argue later', 'as we will see in a minute'. These are usually unnecessary. Try and avoid them. If you need to repeat a point in your argument, simply repeat it. Don't repeat it *and* say that you are repeating it. If you have already argued something, it is fine to repeat it without having also to draw attention to the fact that you are repeating it. Trust the reader's memory.

12.5 HUMANKIND/MANKIND

'Humankind' or 'humanity' are now generally preferred to 'mankind', though their use can pose difficulties.

12.6 PRESENT TENSE AND PLOT

Always use the present tense when describing the actions taking place within a play, novel, or poem. The action within a work of imagination is always assumed to be taking place now. Use the present tense when describing plot. **Examples:**

> At the beginning of 1.7 Macbeth's imagination is overheated. Now he is contemplating murder seriously for the first time. He is struggling to overcome his conscience . . .

or

> In chapter 6 of *A Room with a View* all the main characters go on a picnic together to a high look-out point above Florence. The Italian driver of one of the carriages kisses his girlfriend, and when Mr Eager sees this he becomes annoyed and starts arguing with them.

This use of the present tense is difficult, and takes some getting used to. The Longman style guide puts it like this:

> When you are relating the events that occur within a work of fiction or describing the author's technique, it is the convention to use the present tense. Even though Orwell published *Animal Farm* in 1945, the book *describes* the animals' seizure of Manor Farm. Similarly, Macbeth always *murders* Duncan, despite the passage of time.

12.7 ELLIPSIS (…)

An ellipsis, indicating omitted words, should be only three dots … *not* ….. or …… In typing, the dots should either be separated by space-bar gaps, or you can use the stable ellipsis … to be found under **Insert, Symbol.** If you wish to indicate an omission that starts before the end of a sentence and continues on into a different sentence, use four dots: one for the period or full stop at the end of the sentence and the three for the ellipsis. It is not normally necessary to use an ellipsis at the beginning or end of a quotation, *usually* only in the middle.

12.8 PAGE NUMBER ABBREVIATIONS

In references, p. is short for 'page' and pp. is short for 'pages'. So, p. 49, but, if you are referring to a page range, pp. 49–52. You can't refer to p. 49–52. It's a singular, where you need a plural.

13 THE APOSTROPHE

The apostrophe *s* ('s) causes a great deal of unnecessary trouble. Here is a brief explanation of its correct use.

13.1 THE POSSESSIVE APOSTROPHE

The apostrophe (**'**) often indicates the possessive case of nouns and indefinite pronouns (e.g. anyone, anybody), that is to say, it indicates when something or someone belongs to someone else. **Examples:**

Shakespeare's plays the poet's approach
it is anyone's guess Hardy's death
Kermode and Steinbeck's interpretation
for goodness**'** sake

'The poet's approach' means the approach of one poet; if it were more than one poet, then: the poets' approach.

Notice this difference between the singular and plural apostrophe. **Example:**

Singular	**Plural**
the boy's ball (i.e. the ball belonging to one boy)	the boys' ball (i.e. the ball belonging to a group of boys)

You only add the apostrophe on to the name; you never shorten the name. So, with names already ending in s you add 's, unless the sound becomes very awkward, when you might only add **'**. Keats: therefore, Keats's poetry (*never* Keat's); likewise Hopkins: therefore, Hopkins's poetry (*never* Hopkin's); likewise Dickens: therefore, Dickens's novels.

13.2 THE APOSTROPHE FOR CONTRACTIONS

The apostrophe can be used to indicate left-out letters in contracted words: didn't = did not; hadn't = had not; isn't = is not. Generally, in formal writing, avoid the use of such contractions as much as possible, unless it seems awkward or overly formal to do so.

14 IT'S AND ITS

The words 'it's' and 'its' are commonly confused: the apostrophe of omission (it's) is confused with the possessive (its). **It's** always means **it is** or **it has**, and is *never* to be used in place of the possessive its. **Example:**

It's a beautiful day = it is a beautiful day

(The apostrophe simply indicates the contraction; it stands in for the missing 'i'.)

In formal writing, unless it would be awkward, it is best to avoid this contraction, as I have just this moment avoided it in this sentence (not 'it's best to avoid…'). BUT the possessive use *does not take an apostrophe*:

Examples:

The cat sat on the mat. Its fur was smooth and dark.

The qualities of *Macbeth* that most strike us on first reading are its brevity and passion. I do not know which of its characteristics I admire most.

Its (the possessive) takes no apostrophe because it is on a par with the other possessives, his and her: his head, her head, its head.

15 DASHES

There are three lengths of dashes, each a little longer than the other: the hyphen **-** , the 'en' dash **–** , and the 'em' dash **—** . Their correct use is as follows.

15.1 HYPHEN -

You probably already know about the hyphen. It is worth noting, however, that the number of hyphenated words is tending to reduce in English. Words that were hyphenated are often now tending to lose their hyphens: so, a word like 'mind-set', for example, is now usually written 'mindset'. If in doubt, check your dictionary. The Oxford dictionaries are particularly good on this. You can also look in the online *Guardian Style Guide*, or the *New Oxford Spelling Dictionary* (see 1.3).

15.2 EN DASH –

The slightly longer **en dash** is correctly used to give ranges of numbers or dates, particularly with the abbreviations pp. (which is short for 'pages') and ll. (which is short for 'lines'). In Word, you will find en dashes under **Insert, Symbol**, but the quickest way to put them in is **Ctrl** and **(num) –** (i.e. the minus sign on the far right of the keyboard), pressing these keys at the same time.

Examples:

(pp. 29–30) lines 50–5 lines 125–9 (ll. 50–5) 1999–2001 4. 3. 34–35

15.3 EM DASH —

The longest dash, the **em dash**, is mainly used—as most writing guides will show you—for parenthetical dashes (as we have just used it in this sentence). Again, in Word, it is under **Insert, Symbol**, but is easiest to do with **Ctrl** + **Alt** + **(num) -** . You can use em dashes for parenthetical dashes, but there is now a strong tendency to use en dashes with spaces either side (as in this Guide). So, the first sentence would become: The longest dash, the em dash, is mainly used – as most writing guides will show you – for parenthetical dashes. We do not mind which form you use, but clearly one should not just use hyphens in these contexts.

16 AVOIDING PLOT PARAPHRASE

This is a hard point to grasp, but you will get few marks for simply and uncritically retelling the plot or story of the poem, short story, novel, or play you are writing about. You should assume an educated reader, one who knows the great books and works you are studying, one who already knows, for example, the basic plots in *Macbeth*, *Great Expectations*, *Paradise Lost*, etc.

Of course there is a difference here between simply and uncritically telling the story, and telling the story because you are also making critical, interpretative, or evaluative comments. The latter are good. To show the difference between the unsophisticated retelling of the story, and storytelling that is serving a critical purpose, we take Raymond Carver's famous short story 'Fat' as an example. The following is the kind of relatively naïve account of the plot that we urge you to avoid:

In the story a fat man comes into a restaurant, and the waitress goes to serve him. The waitress and the fat man have a long conversation, during the time in which she brings him the various parts of his meal. After the restaurant has closed, the waitress goes home with her husband or partner, Rudy, and they again speak about the fat man. The story ends with the waitress speaking to her friend Rita.

The above will not get you many marks because it simply relates the story's plot in relatively unsophisticated terms. Here, however, is the same passage with critical, interpretative, and evaluative comments. This is much better:

In the story a fat man comes into the restaurant, **but we see this event from the waitress's point of view, for the story is dominated by her first-person narration.** The waitress and the fat man have a long conversation, **but during this conversation Carver keeps his authorial presence well out of view: he demands of us, as readers, that we try to make sense of what is happening emotionally during the conversation for ourselves.** After the restaurant has closed the waitress goes home with her husband or partner, Rudy, **but there seems to be something anticlimactic here: as readers we begin to be puzzled about where the story is really taking us.**

17 WIDER THINKING

Literary criticism relies in the last analysis – some critics would argue, is inextricably linked to – a wider understanding of politics, philosophy, psychology, theology, sociology, and history. Here it is impossible to cut corners, but clearly the extent of your understanding and life-experience in extra-literary realms will affect your possible understanding of literature. This is one of the things that makes the study of literature so exciting. If you have time to read or think more widely, this is excellent. Debating basic issues among yourselves (or sometimes with your tutors!) can help to achieve subtler, more accurate, more truthful thought. Bear in mind Alistair MacIntyre's wise observation: 'It has become increasingly plain that whether a man calls himself a Christian, a Marxist, or a liberal, may be less important than what kind of Christian, Marxist, or liberal he is'. If you have time (and you may not) the following are excellent (most are in the library):

Herbert McCabe, *The Good* Life
Roger Scruton, *Modern Culture* (formerly published as *The Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Culture*)
Roger Scruton, *Culture Counts: Faith and Feeling in a World Besieged*

Stanley Cavell, Must we Mean What we Say?: see the great philosophical essay on *King Lear, '*The Avoidance of Love'
Mary Midgley, *The Solitary Gene: Darwin and the Selfish Gene*
Mary Midgley *The Essential Mary Midgley*
Richard Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism*
Herbert McCabe, *God Still Matters*
Rowan Williams, *The Edge of Words*
Rowan Williams, *Being Human: Bodies, Minds, Persons*

Study should be a joy. It is finding out more about yourself, others, and the world. One important way of doing well is to be friends with the other people in your year. You can learn a great deal by debate and discussion, by watching a Shakespeare play on dvd with a few friends and then talking through responses; debating a critical essay or approach; finding out what someone else found useful reading on a particular subject. Another way of doing well is to practise and so get to enjoy writing essays, to overcome gradually essay-writing phobia. The discipline of setting down thought and argument, of articulating exactly what you mean, is the process by which the mind naturally grows into a real understanding of itself and its subject.

Mastering the craft of good prose is an exacting but exciting challenge. We want everyone who undertakes a degree in the English Department to go out into the world, or to continue into further study or training, knowing they have acquired real high-level writing skills. Good luck! And always *ask for help* if you need it.

18 MODEL ESSAY PAGES - CORRECTLY STYLED: this page MLA

Essay question: Compare and contrast the interplay between politics and poetry in the work of <u>two</u> of the Romantic poets you have studied on the course.

Like many liberals in England, Wordsworth was deeply moved by the French Revolution of 1789, seeing it at welcome sign of greater political freedom to come. One critic notes 'the swiftness with which Coleridge had developed from distracted undergraduate early in 1794 to take a prominent and active role in contemporary radical affairs' (Roe 117). Wordsworth's viewpoint is well summarized in a letter sent to his friend Matthews in June 1794:

> I disapprove of monarchical and aristocratical governments, however, modified. Hereditary distinctions and privileged orders of every species I think must necessarily counteract the progress of human improvement. (Roe 157)

Wordsworth, like Coleridge, wanted a large increase in the number able to vote in elections, very few at this time. As he wrote in 'A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff': 'If there is a single man in Great Britain, who has no suffrage [vote] in the election of a representative . . . he is a helot [slave] in that society' (Wordsworth 156). One of Coleridge's most obviously political poems, which I will discuss in the next few pages of this essay, is 'Fears in Solitude', where he makes clear how his religious faith lies at the centre of his radical politics. He deplores atheism, which he compares to an owl ignoring the sun (i.e. God):

> (Portentous sight) the owlet, ATHEISM,
> Sailing on obscene wings athwart the noon, . . .
> And, hooting at the glorious sun in heaven,
> Cries out, "where is it?" (79–83)

■ MODEL ESSAY PAGE – CORRECTLY STYLED: this page MHRA

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[4] Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 117.
[5] Roe, p. 157.
[6] William Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: Selected Prose* (London: Penguin, 1988), p. 156.

■ MODEL ESSAY PAGE: CORRECTLY STYLED: this page OUP

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[7] Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford, 1988), 117.
[8] Roe, 157.
[9] William Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: Selected Prose* (London, 1988), 156.