

English 101  
Introduction to College English: ERW  
(K. Gruodis)

*Exploring Themes in Fact and Fiction:*  
ESSAY-WRITING PORTFOLIO PROJECT

“Art is anything done well.” – Gordon Smith (Canadian painter)

### PROJECT INTRODUCTION & GOALS

The goal of this set of assignments is for you to gain the skills needed to confidently approach essays in different courses. While the standard academic essay might seem relevant only to people planning to pursue scholarly careers, it is taught at this level as a tool for developing **writing, analytical, rhetorical, revision and editing skills** that you will be able to apply in many different contexts – from business reports to letters to the editor to wedding speeches!

To get into the ideas of **themes** and to practice developing a piece of writing around a central idea, you will explore and write about a theme that runs through your life in the **Personal Essay** project. This will be done in class and will not count for grades.

The main assignment is to write a well-crafted **750-1000 word Literary Essay** about a short story. A literary essay is a **type of persuasive essay** in which you are trying to convince the reader of the validity of your analysis of a literary text. Your challenge here is to explain how the author of the story uses one or more **literary techniques** to convey one of the key **themes** in his or her text. You will be writing your essay in many stages – from brainstorming and outlining to drafting, revising, and editing – so that you will learn what steps you need to go through to produce a polished (and beautifully written!) final essay.

Have you heard of the Slow Food Movement, which urges people to go back to traditional, slower ways of growing, preparing, and enjoying food? This is the “slow writing” movement: good writing takes time and patience, and is hard, but the results are enjoyable for everyone!

### SHORT STORIES

Select one of the following short stories:

Austin Clarke	“Four Stations in His Circle”
Joseph Boyden	“Abitibi Canyon”
Margaret Laurence	“Horses of the Night”

### ESSAY TOPIC & REQUIREMENTS

Write a well-structured 750-1000 word essay in which you provide an analysis of **how the author uses one or more LITERARY DEVICES to express a THEME in the story.**

Discuss literary elements or techniques such as *plot, setting, foreshadowing, flashback, characterization (character development), imagery, metaphor and simile, symbolism, narration and point of view, dialogue, internal monologue, voice, language/diction*. (See course manual for definitions and more techniques!)

## *PROJECT STAGES* (see due dates on course calendar or schedule)

### Personal Essay

- Done in class over two days (no grade)

### DRAFT 1 – Generate ideas and a basic argument

- Re-read and **annotate** the story
- Create a **mind-map** of ideas you may want to explore
- Make a very **rough outline** (3-4 points)
- Make a **detailed outline** (using template) (5 POINTS)
- Write a **rough draft** that shows the flow of your argument; don't worry too much about style or language

### DRAFT 2 – peer editing; revise your argument and structure

- Bring PRINTED-OUT ESSAY to class for peer editing
- Make **revisions** based on peer editors' feedback
- Submit **revised** essay (Draft 2) to Moodle (15 POINTS)

### DRAFT 3 – Revise content and improve your argument (“Global Editing”)

- Based on feedback, **deepen** your argument, adding more powerful details and quotes
- Work on **flow** and **transitions** within and between paragraphs, using effective signal words (see attached page)
- Use two **new rhetorical techniques** (see attached page for details)
- Develop your **introduction** and **conclusion** to capture the readers' attention and leave them with something to think about
- Revise your **thesis statement** to make sure it reflects the depth of your overall argument
- Revise your **topic sentences** to make sure they capture each paragraph's argument
- Work on **integrating quotes** smoothly and correctly (use “quotation sandwich” and correct punctuation; see page 10 of manual)
- Come up with a strong **title** for your essay (see attached page)
- BRING REVISED DRAFT TO INDIVIDUAL MEETING – PRINTED OUT!
- **Bring PRINTED-OUT essay** (Draft 3) to class for peer editing

### DRAFT 4 – Edit language and style (“Local Editing”)

- Make any final changes to content
- Focus on “Local Editing”: **EDIT** very carefully for style, grammar, punctuation (see handout) – your essay should be easy and pleasant to read, and hold the reader's attention all the way through!
- Present your essay in **MLA format**, including Works Cited (15 POINTS)
- Complete **self-assessment**
- **FINAL DRAFT (4) due on Moodle and printed out, with PORTFOLIO:** \_\_\_\_\_

## *PERSONAL ESSAY: exploring a theme*

All of the short stories we are reading are about people on different life paths, dealing with different life challenges.

### **1 – BRAINSTORMING**

To start working on the idea of *themes*, consider the following questions (take notes, draw a picture, or make a simple mind-map, talk to your neighbor):

- What is an important theme in your life right now, or is there a theme that keeps coming back in your life?
- Can you give several examples of how this theme is manifested in your life?

### **2 – FREE-WRITING**

Free-write for 15 minutes about a theme in your life.

Free-writing rules:

- Write a topic or prompt word at the top of your page.
- Start writing whatever comes to mind in connection to the topic.
- Write continuously, even if you can't think of something new (rewrite the last sentence you wrote if you have to – that will get boring so you'll quickly come up with new ideas!).
- Don't worry about spelling, grammar, punctuation, or if it makes any sense!

### **3 – OUTLINING**

Make a simple outline for a four-paragraph essay:

- Introduction (try to catch the reader's attention)
- Example of the theme #1
- Example of the theme #2
- Conclusion

### **4 – DRAFTING**

Following your outline (unless you get some new or better ideas along the way!), write a short, four-paragraph text:

- Introduction
  - Start off any way you like, but try to include something that will catch your reader's attention, and make sure you start talking about the theme by the end of your introductory paragraph
- Example of the theme #1
- Example of the theme #2
- Conclusion
  - End any way you like, but try sum up what you've written, and leave your reader something to think about

### **5 – SHARING**

Working in small groups, exchange your texts (if you're comfortable with that). Choose one or two people to share some examples of how people wrote about themes.

***Hang on to this text, as we will be looking at it again later in the term (but not for grades!).***

# LITERARY ESSAY: *Pre-writing*

(see pages 5-7 in course manual, and pages 20-24 in *EasyWriter*)

Follow these steps **BEFORE** you start writing your essay!

## 1. Create a **MIND-MAP** to generate ideas:

- Put **THEME** in the middle, branch out to all the **literary techniques** used to express that theme in the story; add as much detail as you can
  - plot
  - setting
  - character
  - narration and point of view
  - language/diction
  - imagery
  - symbols
  - dialogue

## 2. **NARROW DOWN** your ideas and start developing a structure:

- Decide **which literary techniques** you will focus on:
  - **Two options** for structuring your essay:
    - **OPTION 1** – one technique
      - Example 1
      - Example 2
      - Example 3
    - **OPTION 2** – three techniques
      - Technique 1
      - Technique 2
      - Technique 3

## 3. Make a **ROUGH OUTLINE** and get feedback:

- List your theme and techniques
- Write a simple, draft thesis statement (see page 6 in the manual)
- Add supporting points:
  - Supporting point 1
  - Supporting point 2
  - Supporting point 3

## 4. Create a **DETAILED OUTLINE** and get feedback

# LITERARY ESSAY: *Basic essay structure*

(see sample essays in manual)

The structure below gives you an idea of the **standard structure for a basic academic/literary essay**. It can be used in many other kinds of “**expository**” (analytical, explanatory) writing as well. Though following this kind of structure is often a good idea, because it gives you control over your argument, there are definitely other ways of approaching literary analysis. As you go through your studies, just be sure you understand the requirements for each assignment, and if they aren’t clear, be sure to speak with your teacher.

Note that structural rules for essays in English are quite a bit more flexible than they are in French and other European languages. In English/North American academic writing, the most important thing is that your text **coheres** – i.e., it holds together, makes sense, and is pleasant to read. We are quite free in how we get there, so there is plenty of room for creativity!

- **INTRODUCTION**
    - “HOOK” the reader with an interested connection, quote, detail, etc.
    - INTRODUCE author, story (short summary) and theme
    - State your THESIS (the main argument you are making). Thesis statement can be one or two lines, and should give the reader a clear idea of what you will be arguing.
  
  - **BODY** (the number of paragraphs will differ depending on your assignment and the structure of your arguments)
    - **PARAGRAPH** (this is just an *approximate* structure of a paragraph; each one will be slightly different!)
      - **Claim** (topic sentence / main point or argument)
      - **Evidence** (quotes, details) – *approximately* 2-3 per paragraph
      - **Analysis** (what does this mean? how does it connect to your thesis?)
        - **PARAGRAPH**
          - **Claim** (topic sentence / main point or argument)
          - **Evidence** (quotes, details)
          - **Analysis** (what does it mean?)
    - **PARAGRAPH**
      - **Claim** (topic sentence / main point or argument)
      - **Evidence** (quotes, details)
      - **Analysis** (what does it mean?)
- 
- **CONCLUSION**
  - Reinforce your thesis – pull everything together
  - Draw a general conclusion, or raise a question, from the analysis. Try to leave the reader with something to think about.

*This pattern is repeated several times, depending on how much evidence you want to discuss.*

## LITERARY ESSAY DRAFT 3:

### add rhetorical techniques to enliven your writing

Any good piece of non-fiction writing uses a range of techniques. A grip story, an emotional connection, a striking comparison, an irrefutable argument – these are the things that move us and make us remember a text.

As part of the editing process in Draft 3, you must introduce two new rhetorical techniques to your essay. **First of all**, print out your draft and read it carefully, underlining and identify (add a note in the margins) all uses of rhetorical techniques and appeals. **Then**, think about how you can use two additional techniques or appeals to strengthen your arguments and make your writing more convincing to the reader. (You will be able to comment on this process in your final self-evaluation.)

#### Argumentation and persuasion

- All of your arguments must be logical, and the flow of your overall argument must make sense. Don't include anything in your essay that is not related to your thesis. (This does NOT count as a new rhetorical technique for your essay.)

#### Illustration and example

- You will use this when giving examples that back up your arguments. (This does NOT count as a new rhetorical technique for your essay.)

#### Description

- You could use this to describe a character or a setting in more detail, based on what the text has told you.
- Refer to specific, lively details from the text.

#### Definition

- Define any abstract concepts you use – don't assume that your reader understands an idea or term the same way you do.

#### Narration

- You could use this to re-tell an important series of events in a story – but be careful to keep it short!

#### Compare and contrast

- Compare two characters in a story, or the importance of two or more literary techniques.
- Compare one character at different stages of the plot.
- Discuss contrasts: between characters, settings, or the language used in different parts of the text.

#### Cause and effect

- Could be used to explore the effects of different events, characters, or circumstances on a character's development, or on the development of the plot.
- Be careful not to oversimplify either causes or effects, especially when discussing characters.

#### RHETORICAL APPEALS (each one counts as a new technique/appeal)

- *LOGOS* – convincing the reader/audience through rational argument
- *ETHOS* – drawing on the writer/speaker's character
- *PATHOS* – moving the reader/audience through emotional appeals

## JUST TRY TO SAY “NO”: CRAFTING AN *EFFECTIVE TITLE*

The title of a piece of non-fiction writing is the first thing a reader sees, so it’s not surprising that magazine and book editors spend a lot of time coming up with catchy, irresistible titles!

Make sure that your essay has an interesting and descriptive title. Titles can be one or two lines, and must clearly indicate the topic and focus of the essay. The two-line title is used in many types of non-fiction writing, from magazine articles to scholarly books. This kind of title is very effective because it both *catches the reader’s attention* (in the first line) and *provides clear information* about the content and direction of the text (in the second line).

*[Note the **colon (:)** at the end of the first line.]*

Here are a couple of two-line titles for essays on “Dog Monday’s Vigil”:

*An Unlikely Picture of Devotion:  
An Analysis of Canine Character Development in “Dog Monday’s Vigil”*

*Towards a Perfect Ending:  
A Study of Plot Structure and Foreshadowing in “Dog Monday’s Vigil”*

*How to make it all flow:*

### Use **SIGNAL WORDS / TRANSITION PHRASES /CONNECTORS**

Use signal words, transitional phrases, and connectors to help your writing flow better and show clear connections between ideas.

**Signal words** are strong, effective **verbs** that should be used when analyzing the text:

<i>shows</i>	<i>illustrates</i>	<i>portrays</i>	<i>indicates</i>
<i>demonstrates</i>	<i>explains</i>	<i>characterizes</i>	<i>signifies</i>
<i>reveals</i>	<i>describes</i>	<i>represents</i>	<i>proves</i>
<i>depicts</i>	<i>expresses</i>	<i>suggests</i>	<i>clarifies</i>
<i>conveys</i>	<i>establishes</i>	<i>implies</i>	<i>exemplifies</i>

**Transitionals** and **connectors** are prepositions and adverbs that help show relationships between ideas within or between sentences. See attached handout from Academic Skills Centre. See sample essays or any other good nonfiction writing for examples of how they are used.

**HAND THIS SHEET IN WITH YOUR ESSAY!**

**FINAL DRAFT (3 AND 4) – Criteria for Evaluation**

CRITERIA	1-2.5	2.75-3	3.25-3.75	4-5	POINTS
<b>STRUCTURE, ANALYSIS, &amp; ARGUMENT</b>	No clear arguments are made. No distinguishable thesis or supporting arguments. Paragraphs do not contain clear topic sentences. Essay fails to introduce two new rhetorical techniques. Very weak introduction and conclusion.	Weak or unoriginal analysis. Unclear thesis and supporting points. Paragraphs do not contain clear topic sentences. Essay uses two new rhetorical technique or appeals with some success. Introduction and conclusion are missing some elements.	Solid analysis. Clear thesis and supporting points. Each paragraph contains a topic sentence. Essay uses two new rhetorical techniques or appeals effectively. Introduction and conclusion contain necessary elements.	Excellent and profound analysis. Sophisticated thesis and supporting points. Elegant paragraph structure and strong topic sentences. Essay uses two new rhetorical techniques or appeals masterfully, contains compelling introduction and conclusion.	/5
<b>EVIDENCE</b>	No or very weak evidence from text used to support arguments.	Supporting evidence is weak or too obvious; no or few quotations used to back up points.	Arguments are backed up with legitimate evidence from the text.	Arguments are backed up with extensive evidence from the text.	/5
<b>MECHANICS AND STYLE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• grammar</li> <li>• punctuation</li> <li>• literary present</li> <li>• quotes</li> <li>• title</li> <li>• MLA format</li> <li>• Works Cited</li> </ul>	Substantial errors of spelling and grammar consistently interfere with meaning. Incorrect use of literary present. Incorrect style for integrating quotes. Title is vague. Incorrect MLA format and Works Cited.	Errors of grammar, punctuation and spelling interfere with meaning. Incorrect use of literary present. Errors in style for integrating quotes. Title is vague and inaccurate. Incorrect MLA format and Works Cited.	Few errors of grammar, punctuation or spelling; solid style. Correct use of literary present. Few errors in style for integrating quotes. Title clearly expresses the topic and argument of the essay. Correct MLA format and Works Cited.	No significant errors of mechanics; elegant writing style. Correct use of literary present. Correct style for integrating quotes. Title eloquently expresses the topic and argument of the essay. Correct MLA format and Works Cited.	/5
<b>TOTAL</b>					/15

## *ESSAY EDITING CHECKLIST:* use this as you edit and revise

### 1. "GLOBAL EDITING" for structure & argument

#### INTRODUCTION

- "Hooks" the reader in some way – makes us want to read the rest of the essay!
- Mentions the **author** and **title** of the story; provides some context/background about the story and the author.
- Gives a short (1-2 sentences) **summary** of the story.
- Identifies the **theme** of the story.
- Ends with a **thesis statement** that mentions the theme and literary techniques that the essay will explore.

Thesis statement is:

- a **statement** (not a question!)
- a **debatable** argument
- makes **specific** (not vague) points
- clearly indicates what the essay will be about

#### BODY PARAGRAPHS

- **Topic sentences** identify the argument/focus of each paragraph.
- **EVIDENCE:** Details and direct quotes are used to back up the points.
- Paragraph ends with a **concluding or transitional sentence**.
- Each paragraph clearly **supports** the main argument (thesis) of the essay.

#### CONCLUSION

- **Wraps up** the discussion started in the introduction.
- **Restates** the thesis statement in different words.
- Draws a **general conclusion** from the analysis.

## 2. "LOCAL EDITING" for language & mechanics

### ACADEMIC STYLE

- Effective two-line TITLE – identifies topic and suggests argument/focus of the essay
- Essay is written in the **third person** (does not use "I").
- **Author** is referred to correctly
  - first time—full name; subsequent times—last name only
- "**Literary present**" is used to discuss events in the text.
- **Direct quotes** are integrated correctly: (see manual)
  - "**quotation sandwich**" is used to introduce and discuss each quote
  - correct **punctuation** is used to incorporate quotes
  - **block quotes** used where needed

### WRITING & MECHANICS

- Sentence grammar
  - capital letters where needed
  - no sentence fragments, run-on sentences, or comma splices
  - consistent verb tense used
  - correct punctuation
  - subject-verb agreement
  - pronoun-antecedent agreement
- Vocabulary & spelling
  - effective signal words have been used
  - inaccurate or vague words have been replaced
  - spelling errors have been corrected
  - no slang, colloquial expressions

### PRESENTATION

- MLA format for page presentation
- MLA style for citations
- MLA style for Works Cited



# *Essay-Writing* – Final PORTFOLIO

Due: \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE SUBMIT in a thin folder:

- ⑨ Personal Essay “A Theme in My Life”

Literary Essay elements:

- ⑨ Mind-map(s)
- ⑨ Rough outline(s)
- ⑨ Detailed outline (graded, and any other version)
- ⑨ Draft 1 (that was used in peer editing)
- ⑨ Draft 1 peer editing sheet with comments
- ⑨ Draft 3 (that was used in peer editing)
- ⑨ Draft 3 peer editing sheet with comment
- ⑨ Draft 4 – printed, in MLA style, and STAPLED!
- ⑨ Self-assessment