

Royal Fireworks Language Arts by Michael Clay Thompson

Advanced Academic Writing I

An Illustrated Program

Third Edition

Michael Clay Thompson

Royal Fireworks Press
UNIONVILLE, NEW YORK

Matticle 1

Graham Matticle
Ms. DeMeener
English Honors
25 April 2021

The Noble Character of Alexander

The literature about Alexander the Great is extensive. Writers of the modern age have probed the available facts of his life in search of the reasons that enabled Alexander to accomplish seemingly impossible feats of conquest. One potential cause of his extraordinary success might be the magnanimity of his character. Stories abound about Alexander's generosity toward his subjects and for the bravery of his enemies. He often absorbed the blame for the deaths of his army, appointing them to high and responsible ranks.

Works Cited

- Cartledge, Paul. *Alexander the Great*. Iliodd Press, 2014.
- Cummings, Lewis V. "Alexander the Great: His Life and Times." *Ancient Wonders*, vol. 64, no. 4, 2020, pp. 46-78. *Digital Library*, <https://doi.org/24.4168/hum.91>.
- Fox, Robin Lane. *Alexander of Macedon, 356-323 B.C.E.: A Historical Biography*. Randle House, 2019.
- Green, Peter. "Alexander the Great: His Leadership and Legacy." *Classical World*, vol. 102, no. 1, 2011, pp. 1-15.

Matticle 4

Introduction

You Begin with a Decision

A Great Opportunity

If you want to go to college, have a professional career, and live life with an educated mind, then you can do all of these things; you simply must make a strong decision. The decision is whether or not you will learn to write formal academic English. Actually, the decision is unavoidable; if you decide not to think about it, it will be the same as deciding not to learn.

If you accept this challenge, it will be a courageous undertaking. It will take years of mature commitment and self-discipline as your ability develops. You will master complex elements of language and finally combine them into a single, unified talent.

Be realistic: think about all of the formal essays, exams, critical discussions, and research papers you will be assigned in high school, college, and graduate school. You will receive these academic writing assignments not only in English courses but in *every course*—in all of your science, history, and other courses as well. Add to that the reports, reviews, and statements you will have to make in your profession throughout your lifetime.

What these assignments have in common, without exception, is that *you have to write them*. If you write badly, then you will write them all badly. The risks for your grades are clear. If, on the other hand, you write well, then your assignments will be well-written, and the benefits of that are also clear.

Who has the right to say that anyone's writing is bad? Is it not rude to call any writing *bad*? Without question, we live in a democracy, and we are all free to write as we choose, but with so much at stake, we must not be distracted from the unsentimental truth: in education and the professions, there *are* formal academic writing standards, and your teachers, professors, and professional colleagues *will* require you to adhere to them. In your private diary you can have grammar errors and eccentric writing mannerisms, but in the academic world and in the professional world that expects academic standards, it is not up to you; you will be expected to apply formal, standard, academic writing rules, and as you work on all of your written assignments, you either will know what you are doing—or not.

The Right Decision

If you have turned the page and are still reading this book, then you realize that you will have to know how to write academic English. You do not want to be unprepared for excellence. You know that you need tough writing assignments that will help you learn.

The good news is that your decision to learn advanced academic writing puts you on a path that is not only necessary but exciting. First, learning about language is exciting. In the process you acquire a powerful academic vocabulary; a grammatical understanding of the logic of correct, clear, and meaningful sentences; and a sense of formal essay structure that lets you organize your thoughts so that your readers can understand you. The purpose of formal academic writing is to communicate clearly, saying exactly what you think. Second, each of these studies (vocabulary, grammar, essay structure) changes your life, leaving you comfortable and confident and giving you a deep enjoyment of the beauty, integrity, and truth of language. It is fun to know what you are doing.

A Different Kind of Book: An Assignment Book

This book is not a traditional textbook. It is also not a reference book. It is what we might call an **assignment book**. Part of what that means is that this book does not provide all of the knowledge necessary to complete its writing assignments; if it did, it would have to be two thousand pages long. This is not a vocabulary book that will teach you the academic words you will need to use in your writing. You will find strong academic vocabulary in *The Word Within the Word I*. This is also not a grammar textbook, even though correct grammar will be a key element of the correct writing in these assignments. You will find elaborate grammar instruction in *The Magic Lens I*.

Forty Writing Focus Points from an Archive of Actual Research Paper Comments

What this book does give you is four advanced academic writing assignments with special **points of focus** in each assignment. These focus points accumulate throughout the book and continue to accumulate in Volumes II and III. In Volume I there are forty of these special points, in Volume II forty more, and in Volume III forty more. These special focus points are the result of decades of grading advanced formal research papers; they are the very areas that give students the most difficulty.

The Basic Expectations of the Writing Assignments

Research Papers: You Write about What You Have Read in Reputable Sources

This is serious, grown-up work; you are beginning a path that will lead to professional, publishable writing. That fact demands a no-kids-stuff tone of maturity for everything we will do. None of these four papers will be loose opinion pieces or emotional expressions of personal insight. They will be short but precise research papers that require you to use quotations from books and other reputable sources to support your conclusions about actual knowledge. You will have to read and think before writing and then include documented long and short quotations to make your case, showing that your conclusion is not merely a matter of your unsupported opinion but the truth as supported by facts and expert statements.

In other words, these papers cannot be written off the top of your head; they are to be about academic topics. You must choose subjects that you do not already know about and that have serious academic content. Likewise, you may use only serious academic sources for your quotations. You are not allowed to reuse a topic that you wrote about last year. You have to learn the topic before you can write about it.

MLA Method

There are several standards for formal research papers, but the most widely used method in high schools and colleges is the Modern Language Association or MLA method. The Modern Language Association publishes the *MLA Handbook*, which contains the complete collection of MLA standards. That is the method we support and that we require in this program. In advanced academic writing, we always adhere *exactly* to whatever method we use; the expectation is that all formatting rules will be followed to the letter.

Short Length, High Standards

The emphasis in these assignments is quality, not quantity. At this stage of your learning, there is no reason for you to write ten-page or twenty-page papers; you will face most of your challenges in a three-page paper. By keeping your papers short, we can focus our attention on quality, insisting that the English, the essay structure, and the format of the papers be as perfect as possible. You will have time to focus on each detail. In formal academic writing, little details are big deals.

Formal, Standard English

Although we will discuss details of style at length later, we can say that your papers must be written in standard academic English. They must contain no grammar or punctuation errors. You may not use contractions (*don't*, *didn't*, *it's*) in your own sentences, though they may appear in quotations. You may not use first person (*I think*, *in my opinion*) or refer to yourself or your paper (*in this paper*, *on the following page*) in any way. You may not use popular, informal spellings such as *lite* or *thru*. You must use academic vocabulary (*individual*, not *guy*; *impressive*, not *cool*; *excellent*, not *awesome*) and avoid all clichés, which are worn-out, stock expressions such as *the bottom line*, *at the end of the day*, *as cold as ice*, *as clear as mud*, and so forth.

Not Handwritten


This is advanced work, and advanced work is not submitted in handwriting. You will be expected to type the paper yourself on a computer; preparing your own papers is a critical skill you will need. You will type the paper in a legible font such as Times New Roman, which is one of the standard type fonts on computers. Times New Roman is the font used in the sample illustrations in this book. The paper will be double-spaced.

Integrity: No Plagiarism

The sentences in your papers must be entirely your own work unless you document otherwise. All quotations and even paraphrasing (putting someone's ideas into your own words) from a book or article must be clearly documented. Copying someone else's work is called *plagiarism*, and **it will result in a grade of zero**. The MLA method provides a simple, alphabetized Works Cited method for citing—documenting—other writers' work, either their words or their ideas. We will look at the Works Cited instructions in detail later. The main point is that you always—at all times—distinguish honestly and clearly between your own words or ideas and someone else's words or ideas. It is a pleasure to participate in a great tradition of scholarly honor.

Matticle 4

Works Cited

- Cartledge, Paul. *Alexander the Great*. Iliodd Press, 2014.
- Cummings, Lewis V. "Alexander the Great: His Life and Times." *Ancient Wonders*, vol. 64, no. 4, 2020, pp. 46-78. *Digital Library*, <https://doi.org/24.4168/hum.91>.
- Fox, Robin Lane. *Alexander of Macedon, 356-323 B.C.E.: A Historical Biography*. Randle House, 2019.
- Green, Peter. "Alexander the Great: His Leadership in the Context of Today's Political Systems of Consent and Control." *University Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, winter 2020, www.universitystudiesonline.com/alg897/658913235.htm.
- Rogers, Guy MacLean. *Alexander: The Ambiguity of Greatness*. U. of Calidonia 

Rigorous Grading

Your instructor will make the final decisions about which grading method to use, but I will speak to you as though you were in my classroom; that way, even if your instructor is more forgiving than I would be, you will learn what to expect from many teachers and professors in the future. If I were grading your papers, they would be rigorously graded. I always expect the errors you make to be at least at grade level; if you turn in papers filled with elementary errors of spelling and punctuation that you were supposed to have mastered in earlier years, you cannot receive a passing grade. If education is going to work, we cannot continue reteaching the same knowledge year after year; you have to master the content and advance. Anyone might make an occasional elementary mistake or two, but if there is a pattern of negligent carelessness, if you have multiple spelling errors and punctuation errors per page, then that is not passing work. Advanced academic writing contains no careless elementary mistakes, and strict grading now can teach you that standard.

Standard Proofreaders' Marks

Just as there are standard rules for grammar, spelling, and punctuation, there are also standard marks of correction, called *proofreaders' marks*, that the educational and publishing professions use to mark writing errors. In Volume I we will emphasize ten standard ways of marking errors (adding more marks with Volumes II and III of the program) that the professional world uses. The proofreaders' marks that we will feature in this book are:

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| 1. Delete | I have my very own example. | |
| 2. Insert period | Clouds approached. It rained. | |
| 3. Insert comma | He was strict, stern and serious. | |
| 4. Insert space | Alexander reacted to the the situation quickly. | |
| 5. Close up | Suddenly, the bat tle began. | |
| 6. Capitalize | The <u>english</u> defeated the armada. cap | |
| 7. Lowercase | Dickens was a student of H istory. lc | |
| 8. Spell out or spelling error | It was the <u>4th</u> time that week. sp | |
| 9. Insert apostrophe | We saw the brigades' slow advance. | |
| 10. Subject/verb disagreement | The reason for the errors <u>are</u> this. s/v | |

Study these marks carefully. Your instructor will use these on your papers.

Three-Part Essay Structure

We often introduce the essay structure to students by using a simple, five-paragraph model. In this five-paragraph learning model, there is a one-paragraph introduction, three paragraphs of body, and a one-paragraph conclusion. The short research papers we will write are essays with introductions, bodies, and conclusions, but our essays will be more advanced. Our essays will have more than five paragraphs. We might have multiple paragraphs in the introduction, several paragraphs in the body, and more than one paragraph in the conclusion. Good essays reflect the structures of their subjects, and so the essay will have as many paragraphs as the subject needs. How does essay structure work? Study the graphic on the following page closely.

1. **The entire essay is about its thesis (its main idea).** If we let t stand for thesis, we see in the diagram on the next page that the thesis is presented in the **introduction** ($t?$), that a sequence of evidence for the thesis is presented in the **body** ($t1, t2, t3$), and that the meaning of all this information for the thesis is explained in the **conclusion** ($t!$). (Note: A five-paragraph biographical article on an encyclopedic website is not an essay because it does not have a three-part essay structure. If the first sentence is “Shakespeare was born on...,” and the last sentence is “Shakespeare died on...,” then the passage is only a chronological list of facts, lacking a thesis, an introduction, and a conclusion. Do not use an encyclopedia article as your model.)
2. **The entire structure is precisely organized.** *Everything* is organized. The paragraphs of the body are in a logical order ($t1, t2, t3$), and within the paragraphs the sentences are in a logical order (a, b, c, d). Later paragraphs may depend upon facts presented in earlier paragraphs.
3. **The parts of the essay are connected (c), and their relationships to one another are clear at each connection.** Many essays fail at paragraph transitions because readers cannot understand whether the new paragraph is a new idea or only a new example of the same idea. Special connecting words (c) such as *on the other hand*, *in contrast*, or *furthermore* must be written at the seams to make the connection clear. One good way to connect a paragraph to the paragraph before it is to use a D,I complex sentence beginning with a dependent clause. The dependent clause captures the point of the previous paragraph, and then the independent clause introduces the point of the present paragraph. If we have just explained that Jefferson sold his library, and we are now going to discuss the improvements he made to his house, we might begin our new paragraph this way: *After Jefferson sold his library, he used the money to make improvements in Monticello.*

The Basics of an MLA Paper

Clarity and Simplicity

Writing a research paper used to be a frustrating and complex process. The Modern Language Association changed that with its MLA method that reinvented the process, making it vastly easier without sacrificing quality or clarity. For a full presentation of the MLA method, consult the *MLA Handbook*, but in this book we will focus on the central MLA standards.

1. **No title page:** An MLA paper does not have a separate title page. Instead, the required information is included at the top left margin of page one: student name, then instructor name, then course title, then date. The date should be written with the day first, then the month, and then the year. The title of the paper follows and is exactly (not almost) centered.

2. **Double-spacing:** An MLA paper is double-spaced, period. Some other methods single-space long quotations or add extra blank lines at times, but in an MLA paper there are no such variations. Everything, even a long quotation, is double-spaced. Simple is beautiful.

3. **One-inch margins:** An MLA paper uses one-inch margins on all four sides of each page. The exception is the header (the student name and page number), which is flush right and one-half inch down from the top of each page. The right margin of the paper should be **ragged right**, not **justified**. When we justify a page, as in the small example at right, all of the lines line up on the right side; do not justify your paper because that destroys correct spacing between words.

4. **Parenthetical documentation and Works Cited:** At the end of an MLA paper, there is a list of every work you have cited, showing exactly where you found each quotation, paraphrase, or idea by someone else. These works are listed **alphabetically** by authors' last names. Each quotation in your paper is followed by the author's name and the page number of the source where the quotation appears. Look at the following page, and notice how the parenthetical names connect to the same names listed in the Works Cited. Notice how the period comes after the parentheses in a short quotation but before it in a long quotation.

Let us look in more detail at the rules for quotations.

The names in the parentheses and the names in the Works Cited are identical.

Mel O'Dramah
Ms. Tearius
English Honors
15 September 2021

O'Dramah 1
HEADER

The Magnanimous Mind of Alexander

**RAGGED
RIGHT MARGIN**

Writers ancient and modern have probed the facts of Alexander the Great's life in search of the factors that enabled him to accomplish seemingly impossible feats of military genius. One potential cause of his extraordinary success might be the nobility of his character. Stories abound about Alexander's respect for local cultures and for the bravery of his enemies. He often absorbed defeated leaders into his own army, appointing them to high ranks.

At the battle of Gaugamela, Alexander's generals unanimously advised him to attack Darius's huge army at night when darkness would provide some advantage. "Alexander," he replied, "does not steal his victories" (Fox 231). When, after defeating Darius, he gave chase and finally found the king's chariot, Alexander found the king dead, his body unattended:

When Alexander reached it, the only cargo it carried was the dead body of the king Darius. He gazed for a moment at the poor corpse that alone was the spoil of the long race to victory, then took off his cloak and wrapped it around the body of his predecessor. This action was performed in the solemn, respectful manner befitting a king. . . . (Cummings 58)

Alexander's respect for opponents is also seen in his famous encounter with Diogenes of Sinope.

O'Dramah 1
JUSTIFIED

Mel O'Dramah
Ms. Tearius
English Honors
15 September 2021

The Magnanimous Mind of Alexander

Writers ancient and modern have probed the facts of Alexander the Great's life in search of the factors that enabled him to accomplish seemingly impossible feats of military genius. One potential cause of his extraordinary success might be the nobility of his character. Stories abound about Alexander's respect for local cultures and for the bravery of his enemies. He often absorbed defeated leaders into his own army, appointing them to high ranks.

At the battle of Gaugamela, Alexander's generals unanimously advised him to attack Darius's huge army at night when darkness would provide some advantage. "Alexander," he replied, "does not steal his victories" (Fox 231). When, after defeating Darius, he gave chase and finally found the king's chariot, Alexander found the king dead, his body unattended:

When Alexander reached it, the only cargo it carried was the dead body of the king Darius. He gazed for a moment at the poor corpse that alone was the spoil of the long race to victory, then took off his cloak and wrapped it around the body of his predecessor. This action was performed in the solemn, respectful manner befitting a king. . . . (Cummings 58)

Alexander's respect for opponents is also seen in his famous encounter with Diogenes of Sinope. Knowing Diogenes's reputation for mocking him, Alexander prepared in advance for his meeting with the famous Greek philosopher, who was one of the founders of Cynic philosophy. The meeting is said to have taken place in Corinth

O'Dramah 4

Works Cited

Cartledge, Paul. *Alexander the Great*. Iliodd Press, 2014.

Cummings, Lewis V. "Alexander the Great: His Life and Times." *Ancient Wonders*, vol. 64, no. 4, 2020, pp. 46-78. *Digital Library*, <https://doi.org/24.4168/hum.91>.

Fox, Robin Lane. *Alexander of Macedon, 356-323 B.C.E.: A Historical Biography*. Randle House, 2019.

Green, Peter. "Alexander the Great: His Leadership in the Context of Today's Political Systems of Consent and Control." *University Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, winter 2020, www.universitystudiesonline.com/alg897/658913235.htm.

Rogers, Guy MacLean. *Alexander: The Ambiguity of Greatness*. U of Calidonia P, 2018.

Advanced Writing Assignments

This section of the book contains four writing assignments, each more complex and challenging than the former. Each assignment begins with a reflection on vocabulary and grammar. This is followed by a special focus section of ten actual research paper comments emphasizing details of real student papers. Additional components, such as information about outlining, may follow. The specifications of your writing assignments are presented at the end of each section.

FIRST PAPER: SINGLE SOURCE INTERPRETATION OF FICTION

Myerors 1

Mark Myerors

Ms. Achussetts

English Honors

10 March 2018

Give less background, and put more focus on your thesis.

The Character of a Gift

In Robert Louis Stevenson's classic novel *Kidnapped*, an exchange takes place; two characters give to each other in a way that cements their friendship and demonstrates a nobility of character that each one possesses. In no way, shape, or form is this nobility *cliché* of character trivial; it becomes a central theme of the book, explaining why the main character, David Balfour, is able to survive the challenges that he encounters.

mm The scene of the gift begins when David Balfour finds himself on the road in Scotland. Dusty and thirsty, the road stretches on until he sees a man:

. . . I overtook a little stout, solemn man, walking very slowly with his toes turned out, sometimes reading in a book and sometimes marking the place with his finger, and dressed decently and plainly in something of a clerical style. . . This I found to be another catechist . . . being indeed one of those sent out . . . to evangelise the more savage places of the Highlands. (Stevenson 107)

tr The stranger's name is Henderland. Henderland speaks "with the broad south-country [Scottish] tongue" (107), and he is an evangelist in the Edinburgh Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge. As the two walk along, Henderland stops and speaks "with all the wayfarers and workers that we met or passed" (107), and he seems to "be well liked in the countryside" (107).

Combine and condense these two paragraphs.

Henderland is a garrulous conversationalist. He tells David about his work, about the people he knows, and other superfluous information about the region they are traversing. Henderland's affection for people is obvious, and at length he offers David the hospitality of his *g* own home; he "proposed that I should make a short stage, and lie the night in his house a little beyond [the village of] Kingairloch" (108).

Assignment One • Think like an academic writer—about words.

As you write, think carefully about the words you use. You must use words with precision, and you must choose words that have an academic tone. Write with a dictionary on hand, and never use a word unless you know its definition and part-of-speech usage.

A rule of thumb is that, while you want to use only formal vocabulary in your academic writing, and never contractions or clichés (if these occur in quotations, that is all right), you also do not want to overload your sentences with big words. Good writers often use only one power-word in a sentence, and they do not put them in every sentence. These strong words are reserved for emphasis and are often the last word in the sentence because they have more impact there.

One of the ways to learn the tone of academic papers is by absorbing academic vocabulary and getting a feel for how it differs from conversational vocabulary. Here are some formal words from *The Word Within the Word I* that are appropriate for a variety of academic papers. Each listing begins with the chapter of *The Word Within the Word* in which it appears.

Word	Definition	Part of Speech	Example
1. superfluous	excess	adjective	The objection was superfluous .
1. posthumously	after death	adverb	The book was published posthumously .
2. neophyte	beginner	noun	As a poet, he was a neophyte .
2. incredulous	disbelieving	adjective	The readers were incredulous .
3. specious	false	adjective	The specious argument convinced him.
3. elucidate	explain	verb	Harper Lee elucidated the scene.
4. equanimity	calmness	noun	Ahab's equanimity was startling.
4. magnum opus	great work	noun	<i>Walden</i> was Thoreau's magnum opus .
5. hyperbole	overstatement	noun	The claim was mere hyperbole .
5. altruism	selflessness	noun	Toad was not known for altruism .

Discussion Questions

Are any of these words unknown to you? Which ones? Which word would you most like to add to your vocabulary? Which word might be most useful in formal papers?

Assignment One • Focus Areas—Actual Research Paper Comments

You cannot focus on hundreds of things at once. Each of the four assignments in this text emphasizes ten important writing details. They may be details of grammar, style, format, or thought. These comments are drawn from my decades of assigning and grading advanced academic writing in the classroom; they are word-for-word comments that I actually wrote on students' papers. Some of them are re-examinations of points we have already seen. Some of them are big ideas, and some of them involve little perfections (small details are not unimportant; that is one of the major realizations of academic writing). These comments show common issues for students who are just learning to write advanced academic papers.

Here are three positive comments:

1. You are thinking—constructing a case.

One of the advanced features of your paper is that the paper is not a mere report; it is a display of your individual reasoning. You do not limit yourself to the role of reporter, humbly displaying other people's ideas; instead, you structure the paper as an argument, a display of your own ideas, for which you use facts and expert comment to support what you say. That is excellent.

2. Your thesis is in sharp focus.

Your paper has an outstanding focus on the thesis. This is an achievement that results from having done many things well at the same time: clear wording, intellectual clarity, organization of essay components, and excellence of introduction and conclusion.

3. Your quotations are excellent.

A quality that distinguishes your paper is your excellent selection of material for quotation. These well-chosen quotations lend force and cogency to your argument. They also provide readers with interesting passages to read, and they show a high level of comprehension on your part.

Rivera 3

So much for gypsy caravans. The impressionable Toad is overwhelmed with enthusiasm for the magnificent motor-car. Suddenly, he wants nothing to do with his "splendid" gypsy cart. Ratty and Mole see the crazed look in Toad's eye, and Mole asks what they can do. "Nothing at all," the Rat answers. "Because there is really nothing to be done. You see, I know him from of old. He is now possessed" (51)

Ratty is right. When next we see Toad, he too is shouting as he careens out of control around the country roads in his own motor-car. Ratty, Mole, and Badger have to

and in the process they have

Assignment One • Planning and Preparing the First Paper

As you begin, keep in mind that you have a choice: you can be either happy or unhappy when you have formal writing assignments. You have to do such assignments either way, so you may as well enjoy learning something important and select subjects that you would like to know about. Academic happiness is a sign of intellectual maturity. Follow these five steps:

1. Read, reread, take notes, and think. Repeat as necessary.

You begin, always, by reading from reputable sources. As we have seen, academic papers are not about nothing, and they are also not expressions of our personal feelings or preferences. They are not unsupported opinions. They are about academic truth: interpretations of important novels, examinations of scientific ideas, considerations of historical hypotheses. So you get to read—to find something worth saying about the subject—and you always spend *much* more time reading, thinking, and taking notes than you do writing. This is one of the reasons academic papers are so important in our intellectual development: they push us into deep investigations.

One of the fatal mistakes beginners make is to be impatient about this reading-thinking stage. If you attempt to write too soon, if you do not settle down for a great read, you are in trouble because good ideas are not on the surface to be scooped up by skimmers. The good ideas are down in the crevices of the story, hidden in the nuances, waiting in the shadows where serious and respectful readers can find them. You have to read enough to write enough.

The most common reason that students are impatient with reading and research is that they have negative attitudes or feelings about reading. It is essential that you think and feel positively, that you define yourself as someone who loves to read and learn, and that you believe in the value and meaning of your topic. Great academic minds are always excited about knowledge; without that excitement, they would never push themselves to high achievements. You work harder when you care.

Your instructor will give you specific guidelines about the literature selections you may use, and it will then be up to you to read, slowly and carefully, and reread (research shows that the best readers reread and re-reread), searching for an interesting observation. Once you notice something good, then you will reread yet again to find lines in the text that you can quote to support and illustrate your case.

What kind of idea would be interesting? It should be something that is not obvious to everyone who reads the book. No one wants to read a case that Captain Hook is a villain. We all know that. Your thesis should be a *contribution* to the existing knowledge. It should require a new case to be made, and your paper is the case.

2. Organize and outline.

As you read, you begin to see how to organize your paper. You find good quotations that support your argument. Your instructor may or may not require you to turn in an outline, but formally or informally, outline your paper. Plan your introduction, body, and conclusion. Decide what quotations to use and where to put them. Know your plan well before you start writing.

3. Write your first, high-quality draft; the first draft is the most important.

Never write what is sometimes called a *rough draft*; even a first draft should be carefully written—not rough. If your first version is rough, it will take you twice as long to write the paper because you will have made a mess to clean up. From the beginning write carefully, as though you know you will not be able to revise. Write the essay in sections: introduction, body, and conclusion. Use a key thesis word, a microlanguage, consistently to tie the sections together. Write clear transitions between paragraphs. Write a patient, thoughtful, and complete conclusion. Doing your first draft on a computer makes revision much easier later.

4. Take a break; then revise.

Get away from the essay until your mind clears and you can see what you have actually written. Once you can be objective, revise the paper carefully. Almost certainly, the first draft will be too wordy, and you will be removing unnecessary words, or sentences, or even paragraphs.

5. Proofread.

Proofreading takes a long time, and good students proofread obsessively. Check each detail over and over. It is impossible to proofread rapidly. You have to go slowly, checking each word and punctuation mark, each MLA detail. Advanced academic proofreading requires a tough, disciplined mind.

Assignment One • Single Source Interpretation of Fiction

Advanced Academic Details

This first essay will give you an opportunity to fine-tune your details. Remember that this is one of the first expectations of advanced academic writing: the basic details of language, format, and essay form must be correct. Let us look at a summary of the assignment.

Purpose: Establishing a Basic Foundation

This simple essay using only one book will give you an opportunity to concentrate on the basic details of English, MLA, and essay format.

Topic: Interpretation of a Classic Work of Fiction

Your essay will develop an interpretive idea about a work of fiction. You may not write a biographical paper about the author's life. The work may be a novel, a play, or even a short story, depending on your instructor's guidelines. Your interpretive idea will be the thesis of your essay. It need not be a Nobel Prize grand idea; a focused but illuminating observation about the facts or meaning of the story will be appropriate for the short length of the paper. You need not write about the main theme of the work if you do not wish to; you may choose something smaller that you notice and wish to write about. Your instructor may provide additional specifications or limitations on the topic.

Length: Three Pages

This paper must be no more than three pages long, with a fourth page for the Works Cited. Page three should contain a half-page or more of text.

Due Date: Provided by Instructor

Your instructor will assign the date, providing at least two weeks for both research and writing. Late papers will lose one letter grade per day.

Format: MLA

This will be an MLA essay with long and short quotations. A paper done in any other format will be returned to you to be redone. The instructor may assign a letter-grade-per-day penalty for lateness in such a case. The paper should be

printed on one side of the page only in a legible 12-point font that is double-spaced and has a ragged right margin. There must be a minimum of one long quotation and three short quotations in the paper. There is no separate title page. Do not hole-punch your paper or put it in a plastic or cardboard folder; keep it professional-looking.

Structure: Essay

This paper should be a three-part thesis essay with an introduction, body, and conclusion. The paragraphs should be organized and clearly connected. Use a key word from your thesis to connect the paper.

Source: One Source Required

For this first paper only one source is required: the text of fiction itself. You may base your analysis entirely on your own thinking, using quotations from the work of fiction to illustrate and prove your idea. Note that your Works Cited page will be titled “Work Cited” because you will use only one source.

Honor: Your Plagiarism Pledge

Before you turn your paper in, you should write on page four, “I know that plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else’s words or ideas, and I pledge that this paper is not plagiarized,” and sign it. A plagiarized paper will receive a zero.

Instructor: Your Instructor Is the Authority

For all of these guidelines, your instructor has the final say. If your instructor wants to amend any detail, that is final.

Here is a sample paper that—if I were grading it in our imaginary class—would make an A on this assignment. Read and examine it closely. In my actual high school and middle school advanced academic classes, I would have given it:

1. A **D** because it is in good English.
2. A **C** because it is in proper MLA form.
3. A **B** because it is a correct essay structure.
4. An **A** because it has an interesting, worthwhile idea.