LITERARY SELECTION ESSAY GUIDELINES

"Students often think that they are writing for the teacher, but this is a misconception; when you write, you are the teacher."
~ Sylvan Barnet, A Short Guide to Writing About Art

Each student is required to complete three essays over the course of the term. Each chapter of the textbook includes several literary selections (under the heading of “READING”, for example: READING 1.22 From Seneca’s On Tranquility of Mind) accompanied by questions that are designed to promote critical thinking. For each of the three sections of our studies each student is asked to choose a particular selection and to write a short essay (two-pages typed, 600-word minimum) that addresses the accompanying questions. A completed essay for each section is due no later than the day that particular section exam is given (exam dates are stated in the course schedule) and absolutely NO late essays will be accepted.

Two goals of the assignment are to allow a student the opportunity to illustrate his/her understanding of the selection and ability to critically address the questions provided, not to simply express opinions. Keep this in mind as you are writing your paper. Each student is expected to write a well-developed and organized essay, which should include the following.

• **The title**: Although this might not be the first part that you write, be sure to give your essay an original and engaging title, something other than just the title of the literary work you are writing about.

• **Introductory paragraph**: this should be well planned. Use a “hook” at the beginning of your paper - something that catches your reader’s attention, such as a quote, a question, a little-known fact, or a passage from the work that is the focus of your discussion. And remember that the most important part of your introduction is your thesis statement, which is a brief (typically one sentence) statement that clearly defines the main idea and purpose of your paper and states your main points. If you are making an argument in your paper, your thesis should also clearly define the core of your argument (your claim). This thesis will be the thread that runs through your paper and ties it all together.

• **A few paragraphs**: discussing and developing your main points of focus. Each individual paragraph should begin with a topic sentence and should develop a specific point as a part of the larger paper. Remember, you want to provide your reader with a basic understanding of your topic and to help them see the subject through your eyes, so work to communicate your ideas effectively. Since you are addressing particular questions, so be sure that you do so clearly and directly. You should also use transitional words and phrases between ideas and paragraphs to give the essay a sense of coherence and cohesiveness.

• **A concluding paragraph**: remind your reader of your main points and briefly restate and reinforce your response(s). And just like the “hook” in your introduction, you want to close with a comment or a question that will leave a lasting impression on your reader.

• **Review your paper**: as the author, you are responsible for carefully proofreading your paper. Check for and correct spelling and grammatical errors. Pay attention to the recommendations that spell-check and grammar-check provide and make the necessary corrections. Be sure that you submit a final draft, not a rough draft, of your paper.

Students are encouraged to use the resources and assistance available at the Writing Center in the Academic Success Center (BACA 207). For more information, visit the HCC-Brandon Campus Writing Center webpage @ http://www.hccfl.edu/br/student-services/writing-center.aspx
Some points to consider while writing and to double-check when reviewing your paper
(from A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers by Erika Lindemann)

Subject, Audience, Purpose
- What is the most important part of what I want to say about my subject/topic?
- Who is the audience for this paper? What would my reader want to know about the subject? What does my reader already know about it?
- Why do I think the subject is worth writing about? Will my reader think the paper was worth reading?
- What verb explains what I am trying to do in this paper (tell a story, compare X and Y, describe Z)?
- Does my first paragraph answer each of the previous questions? If not, why not?

Organization and paragraphing
- What is the thesis? Is it stated clearly (in a sentence) or implied appropriately? Is it focused? Did I avoid blatant thesis markers such as "In this essay I will..."?
- How many specific points do I make about my subject?
- How many paragraphs did I use to discuss each point?
- Why did I discuss my points in this order? Should the order be changed?
- Did I overlap or repeat any points? Did I leave points out or add some that are not relevant to the main idea?
- How did I get from one point to the next? What signposts, like transitional words or phrases, did I give the reader?
- What is this paragraph supposed to do? How does it relate to the paragraph before and after it?
- What is the main point of the paragraph? Is there a clear topic sentence in this paragraph? Will my reader have trouble finding it?
- How many sentences did it take to develop the topic idea? Can I incorporate better examples, reasons, or details?
- How well does the paragraph hold together? When I read the paragraph out loud, does it flow smoothly?
- How does my paper end? Did I keep the promises I made to my reader at the beginning of my paper? Did I develop and fulfill my thesis?

Sentences
- Can my reader “see” what I am saying? Do the details explain or even enlarge the meaning of the ideas rather than just repeat the ideas?
- What words could I substitute for “people,” “things,” “this/that,” “aspect,” “etc.”, to make what I am saying more clear? Use a dictionary and a thesaurus to help you vary the language you use in your paper.
- Is this sentence “fat”? Are there any words that are unnecessary?
- Is this sentence “thin”? Are there any words that would improve what I am trying to say?
- Are the sentences different lengths and types?
- Can I combine this sentence with another one?
- Which sentences in my paper do I like the most? The least?
- Can I add adjectives and adverbs or find a more active verb?
- Did I check grammar, spelling and punctuation? What kinds of grammar or punctuation problems did I have in my last paper?

Some points to double-check before submitting your paper
- Your paper must have a strong introduction with a clear and focused thesis statement that addresses the assignment, a body that develops your thesis, transitions between ideas and paragraphs, and a solid conclusion.
- Carefully proofread what you have typed and check for spelling and grammatical errors. Papers that are poorly written or that have numerous typographical errors will likely receive a lower grade.
- You do not need to use any outside sources besides the selection from the literary work. However, if you choose to use outside sources (including contextual information from the textbook), they MUST
be properly cited (in MLA or APA style). This requires citations within the body of the text and a list of works cited at the end of your paper. Failure to cite your sources is considered plagiarism (literary theft) and will result in a failing grade for the assignment and, potentially, for the course.

- Your paper must be a minimum of 600 words (at least two typed pages) and must include an accurate word count. Any paper that does not meet this minimum length requirement will automatically receive an “unsatisfactory” grade.
- The paper must
  - be typed and double-spaced
  - use standard margins (1” top and bottom, 1” or 1.25” left and right),
  - use an 11- or 12-point font that is easy to read (Times New Roman, Arial, Courier, or similar font). DO NOT use a font that is fancy or difficult to read.
- Please DO NOT use a cover sheet and be sure to include the following information in the upper left-hand corner of the first page:
  - Your Name,
  - the Course Number and Section,
  - the Instructor’s Name,
  - the Date,
  - the Number and Title of the Selection and
  - a Total Word Count (no less than 600 words)
- Please DO NOT include any artwork in your paper.
- Please staple your paper in the upper left-hand corner and please DO NOT submit it in any type of binder or folder.

**Evaluation**

Each essay should illustrate college-level writing and will be evaluated on the quality of writing (style and technique), the originality of thought, sound reasoning and logic, clarity, and appropriate content. Essays will be graded on a satisfactory (satisfactory-plus/satisfactory/satisfactory-minus) and unsatisfactory basis. Each student is required to complete and submit three satisfactory essays over the course of the semester. This rubric will be used in the evaluation of each essay.

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<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Level of Achievement</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satisfactory-Plus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Requirements, Purpose and Focus</td>
<td>The writer addresses and develops each aspect of the assignment; the writer’s purpose is present, appropriate for the assignment, and maintained throughout; the main idea is clear and maintained; the writer exhibits an awareness of the audience’s needs and expectations.</td>
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<td>Audience</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Organization</td>
<td>The writer uses the opening to introduce the main idea, capture the reader's attention, and prepare the reader for the body of the paper; transitional words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs smoothly connect the paper's elements, ideas and/or details, allowing the reader to follow the writer's points effortlessly; each paragraph is unified around a topic that relates to the main idea; all paragraphs support the main idea and are ordered logically; closing synthesizes the elements, supports the main idea, and finalizes the paper.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language/Clarity</td>
<td>Word choice reflects strong grasp of language appropriate to the topic, purpose, and audience; sentences are clear and understandable; sentences vary in degree of complexity; point of view is clearly established, consistent,</td>
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<td>Logic/Reasoning and Support</td>
<td>Grammar</td>
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<td>Exhibits a logical progression of ideas that support the focus of the paper; strong evidence of understanding, critical thinking and/or thoughtful analysis; claims are well supported with sufficient clarity, depth and accuracy; points are supported with sufficient number of details.</td>
<td>Overall essay is grammatically and mechanically correct with few (only one or two) errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and syntax but these do not greatly affect readability.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attempts a logical progression of ideas that support the focus of the paper; shows evidence of understanding, critical thinking and/or thoughtful analysis; details are related to the topic but do not support claims with sufficient clarity, depth and accuracy; additional details are needed to develop some points.</td>
<td>A limited number of (no more than five) errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and syntax that have limited affect on readability.</td>
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<td>Progression of ideas is interrupted by errors in logic, such as absolutes and contradictions; shows some signs of understanding, critical thinking, and/or thoughtful analysis; details are loosely related to the elements of the text, but are lacking clarity, depth and accuracy; additional details are needed to develop several points.</td>
<td>Writing contains several (more than five) errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and syntax that affect readability.</td>
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<td>The attempt at progression of ideas is unsuccessful due to significant errors in logic; shows few signs of understanding, critical thinking, and/or thoughtful analysis; includes minimal details that provide little to no explanation or support for the claims; additional details need to develop most points.</td>
<td>Writing contains and excessive (more than ten) errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and syntax that substantially affect readability.</td>
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Any student who submits an unsatisfactory essay will be required to go to the Writing Center, rewrite and resubmit the essay so that it is satisfactory (the highest grade that a revised essay can earn is a satisfactory-minus) within a week after grades are returned. Any student who chooses not to do so will receive a zero (0) for the essay.

If you have ANY questions regarding this assignment, you will need to ask me before submitting your paper! Reasons like (although not limited to) “I didn’t understand” should not be used as a defense or a response to receiving a grade lower than you expected.