Filozofická fakulta
Faculty of Philosophy

Jihočeská univerzita
v Českých Budějovicích
University of South Bohemia
in České Budějovice

LITERARY ESSAY WRITING GUIDELINES

Every essay submitted at the Department of English Studies must contain the title page included at the end of these guidelines.

General Remarks
- An academic essay is a specific genre. Unlike what the majority of students experienced at high school, it is not based on their individual feelings and thoughts on a certain topic. In the context of a literary seminar, it is an analysis of a literary text based on an argument and supported by evidence from both primary and secondary sources.
- These guidelines were created to assist students when writing their first essays. Students should not rely solely on them and are encouraged to do their own research into essay writing methodology.
- Students should always make sure they are familiar with the requirements of the particular course.
- For BA thesis specifics see BA Thesis Guidelines:
https://www.ff.jcu.cz/images/FF/fakulta/ustavy/anglistiky/pro-studenty/bakalarska-zkouska/inforamce-ba-thesis/ba-thesis-in-literature-guidelines-final-version-2023.pdf.

**What is NOT an Academic/Literary Analysis Essay**
- summary of the plot
- list of the characters and their description
- extensive information on the author or historical context unless it is directly relevant to the topic
- everything that you know and think about the text divided into paragraphs
- list of the topics and motifs discussed in the seminar

Topic Selection
- Selection of an appropriate topic is essential for writing a successful academic essay.
- Students are required to select one aspect/motif/topic of a literary work they wish to analyse. Comparison of several works is possible, but it must be justified.
- It is important to select a topic that fits the required length, meaning that some topics are more suitable for an essay of 1,000 words while other work better for a BA/MA thesis. The topic should be discussed in some depth using appropriate academic secondary sources. It is recommended to consult the topic with the instructor prior to writing even if they do not require it.
- You should prepare an annotated paragraph plan before you begin writing the actual essay. This plan can consist of an outline emphasizing the main points you want to discuss in the essay. It also helps to determine whether the topic is suitable for the assigned word range.
- The topic should not be a repetition of a claim from the work that would be obvious to any reader. Instead, you should add knowledge or interpretation that will help the reader understand the text better (usually a theme/motif/narrative strategy). For example, in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat" a topic like 'the madness of the narrator' is not a good one, because the story clearly shows that he is mad. Better

topics would be to look for the reasons he lost his sanity in the story or to compare his statements with 19th century medical knowledge about mental illness.
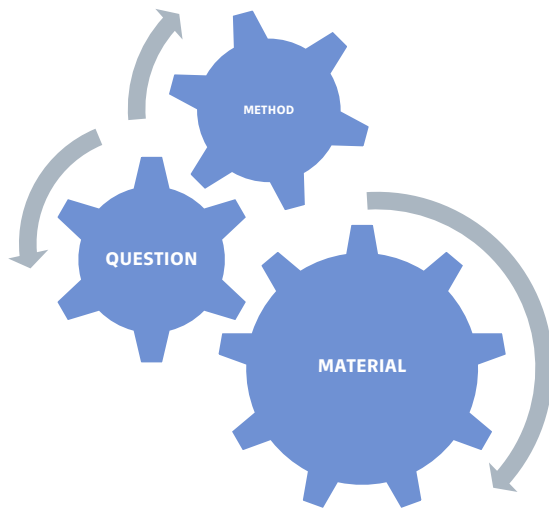
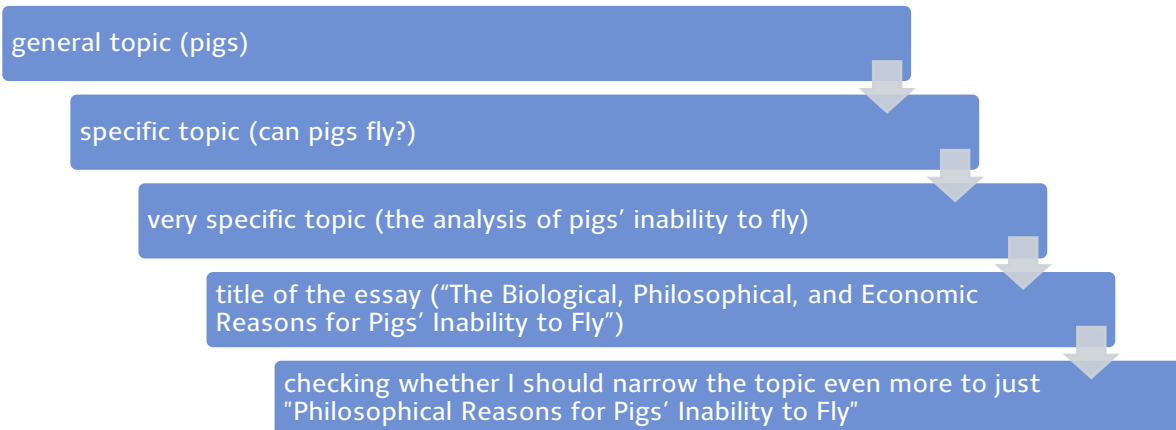• When selecting a topic, it is crucial to clarify three main areas:

1 MATERIAL – what work/works you want to analyse
2 QUESTION – what you want to analyse in this work
3 METHOD – how you want to approach this topic

All the three main components must work together to create a good essay.

Narrowing the Topic

general topic (pigs)

specific topic (can pigs fly?)

very specific topic (the analysis of pigs' inability to fly)

title of the essay ("The Biological, Philosophical, and Economic Reasons for Pigs' Inability to Fly")

checking whether I should narrow the topic even more to just "Philosophical Reasons for Pigs' Inability to Fly"

Structure
- Each essay should consist of 3 main parts + Works Cited:
  1. introduction
  2. argument/main body
  3. conclusion
  4. Works Cited

1. Introduction
   - The introduction should include a clear thesis statement which in one or two sentences summarizes what the student is claiming in the essay, e.g. This essay analyses the reasons why the narrator in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat" lost his sanity).

- Thesis statement usually implies a question – it needs to be arguable, not a statement of a fact (imagine you state that the narrator in "The Black Cat" is mad – there is no argument to be made about it because it is a fact).
- The introduction should not be overly general. Students are not expected to provide any biographical information about the author unless it is substantial for their interpretation and the same applies for plot summary.

2. Argument/Main Body
   - Also called *academic argument.*
   - In terms of an essay, an argument means a claim that the essay writer is making, not an act of disagreeing with someone.
   - The argument is the main body of the essay. It should have a clear structure with individual paragraphs focused on individual points.
   - A good argument is presented in a clear and logical way, avoiding ambiguity as much as possible.
   - The argument must be supported by examples and direct quotations from the primary source(s). Each general observation must be accompanied by examples from the chosen text.
   - The argument must be supported by knowledge and observations by other scholars taken from secondary sources. These can provide background information or offer interpretations of the text that contribute to the understanding of the claims made in the essay. They should inform but not replace your own arguments.

3. Conclusion
   - The conclusion should not present new information but summarise the findings of the argument.
   - The conclusion needs to answer the main question raised in the introduction and show how the argument led to this answer.

4. Works Cited
   - Whenever you quote primary or secondary sources, a "Works Cited" page must be included at the end of the essay.
   - The "Works Cited" page must list all the sources cited in the essay and only the sources cited.

- The essay must be clearly structured. Apart from the general structure introduction–argument–conclusion, transition signals (e.g. on the other hand, however, moreover, next, finally, etc.) are a very useful tool to achieve internal coherence of the text.
- The essay must have a clear development, taking the reader from point A to point B. This is the part where an outline comes handy.
- Each paragraph should begin with a topic sentence which introduces the main idea of the paragraph.
- The essay must stay focused and stick to the main argument. If you need to discuss several topics to explain the main argument, you need to add an explanation of the connection between the topics.

- The title is an integral part of an essay. You should make sure the title corresponds to the specific topic of the essay (e.g. "Analysis of Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*" does not give potential readers any idea what the author focuses on in their analysis, while "[Analysis of] Dysfunctional Family Relationships in Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*" does).

Style
- Students are expected to use academic style, meaning the essay should be explicit in explaining the author's ideas objectively, emotionally neutral, formal, and use appropriate register in terms of both grammar and vocabulary (personal judgments such as "I chose to write about this book because I like it" do not belong in an essay).
- Coherence is key. Students need to be coherent in their style and their ideas and the sentences must hold together. Proper use of discourse markers (adverbs, conjunctions, etc.) is crucial for expressing inner relationships in a paragraph and in between the paragraphs.
- Contractions must not be used in formal style (don't → do not, can't → cannot, etc.).
- English quotation marks differ from the Czech ones and look like this: ''/"". Double quotation marks are used for direct quotations. If you set English as the language of the document, it will write the correct quotation marks automatically.
- Authors should always be referred to by their family name, e.g. "Austen's novels partially reflect her life experience" and NOT "Jane's novels partially reflect her life experience". When mentioning an author for the first time, their full name is used. Then you switch to a family name.
- When a source is mentioned in the essay for the first time, it is good to include the year of publication [e.g. This essay focuses on the relationship between the human and the nonhuman in the novel *The Crossing* (1994) by the American author Cormac McCarthy]. This applies for both primary and secondary literature.
- Present simple is the basic tense of an academic style since it states facts and ideas. It is used for describing a part of the plot, etc. (e.g. The analysis focuses...; At the beginning of the play, Hamlet encounters a ghost...). It should be used as much as possible throughout the essay (including the introduction and conclusion), especially when quoting someone because it may sound outdated otherwise (e.g. the author of this paper says/claims/observes). Of course, other tenses are used to express correct time sequence, etc.

Formatting
- Students are required to use MLA formatting: Times New Roman, 12pt, double-spaced.
- The title is centred, title-cased (not in all caps), and not italicised (with the exception of book titles) or underlined, e.g. "Dysfunctional Family Relationships in Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*").
- Students should include a header with their last name and page number in the upper right-hand corner.
- Book titles are italicised, short stories/poems/essays are in quotation marks (e.g. *Everything That Rises Must Converge* as a whole short story collection is italicized while "Everything That Rises Must Converge" as a short story is in quotation marks).

- When in doubt, see https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_general_format.html, which contains a sample of the first page.

Secondary Literature/Sources
- Finding and consulting with relevant academic secondary literature (aka secondary sources) is an integral part of writing an essay and should be taken into consideration during the process of selecting the topic.
- Secondary literature should predominantly serve as evidence and support for student's claims. Nevertheless, the secondary sources are not to be read uncritically and the student can also include counter-arguments, or point out the limitations of a source.
- It is perfectly fine to disagree with secondary literature; actually it is an opportunity to demonstrate student's ability of critical thinking. Including a counter-argument is optional and the student should make sure that this counter-argument is valid for the argument they make in the essay (it should not be an end in itself). Make sure you fully understand the argument you are criticising and that your counter-argument is based on facts. "I do not agree with this" is not a counter-argument; you need to explain why.
- Secondary sources must be relevant to the topic of the essay. If you cannot find any secondary source discussing the particular topic, you can look for sources discussing the chosen text, other works by the same author, or the chosen topic in the literary period or movement to which the text belongs. You may also use secondary sources providing general information about the chosen topic or relevant theoretical analysis. If you encounter difficulty in identifying relevant sources, consult with the teacher.

- Generally, the most reliable academic sources are books published by well-known publishing houses or university presses or articles published by peer-reviewed academic journals.

- **What Is an Acceptable Source**
  - publications available in the university library
  - articles found in academic repositories such as *JSTOR* or *ProQuest*
  - articles from academic journals devoted to a specific writer or topic, e.g., *Journal of Beckett Studies* or *Journal of Victorian Studies*
  - books published by university presses or academic publishers
  - Note on academia.edu and ResearchGate: texts published on these platforms are uploaded by users and are not checked for academic value. Students can only use materials from these platforms if they have been published in a peer-reviewed journal or book.

- **What Is NOT an Acceptable Source**
  - Non-academic online sources such as SparkNotes, CliffsNotes, Shmoop, etc. These guides are usually created by unqualified writers and can be misleading or erroneous.
  - Student theses of all levels and universities (though they might be a good source of secondary literature).

- General audience popular history or culture sources, such as YouTube videos, TV documentaries, websites of cultural institutions (e.g. the British Library), or any other source that has not been peer-reviewed.
- Wikipedia cannot be used as a secondary source since it is not an academic source and the information provided may not be accurate. However, it can be useful for finding academic sources as it includes references. If you need a general encyclopaedia, you can use *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

Plagiarism
- Whenever you use any source, no matter whether you quote it directly, paraphrase or summarize the idea, you must refer to this source properly to avoid plagiarism. Plagiarism means using the ideas of others without proper citation. Plagiarism in any form will not be tolerated.
- When researching the topic, it is essential that you make detailed notes/photocopies and know where you came across the idea you mention in your essay and can cite it properly.
- Students must not copy-paste any part of their text from anywhere apart from the clearly marked quotations.
- Students need to familiarize themselves with the university rules for AI use available here: https://www.jcu.cz/images/student/ai_zaverecne_prace.pdf.

Paraphrase and Quotation
- **Paraphrase** means that you mention an idea from a secondary source but put it in your own words.
- **Direct quotation** means that you copy exactly the same words as the primary/secondary source.
- Both a quotation and a paraphrase must be incorporated properly to distinguish between your own ideas and ideas of others. You should use a signal phrase to introduce the quotation/paraphrase ("Kovářová claims that" in the examples), then quote/paraphrase and then add your commentary – you need to elaborate on the quotation (not included in the examples).
  Examples (Kovářová is an author of this document):
  - When the author is mentioned in the signal phrase:
    Paraphrase: Kovářová claims that we should not use the ideas of others without proper citation (6). vs. Direct quotation: Kovářová claims that "[w]henever you use any source, no matter whether you quote it directly, paraphrase or summarize the idea, you must refer to this source properly to avoid plagiarism" (6).
  - When the author is not mentioned in the signal phrase:
    Paraphrase: We should not use ideas of others without proper citation (Kovářová 6). vs. Direct quotation: One rule of writing an essay is that "[w]henever you use any source, no matter whether you quote it directly, paraphrase or summarize the idea, you must refer to this source properly to avoid plagiarism" (Kovářová 6).

Paraphrase
- Paraphrase does not mean that you copy a sentence/paragraph/any segment of the text and substitute a couple of words. This is considered plagiarism and absolutely unacceptable. Instead, paraphrase means that you summarise the claim or present it in a significantly different form.

- The in-text citation must immediately follow the paraphrased segment.
- When you refer to the plot of the primary source and do not use a direct quotation, you do not have to use a citation or refer to a particular page unless it is necessary for understanding.
- Paraphrase is NOT a whole paragraph of text with a citation in the end. Both paraphrases and quotations at the end of the paragraph should be avoided since students are expected to develop the paraphrased/quoted idea further and elaborate on it.
- Similarly, quotations or paraphrases should not appear at the very beginning of the paragraph since the paragraph should be introduced by a topic sentence.
- Note that essays submitted in the department go through a plagiarism check that includes, among others, a comparison of the text with its sources that flags cases of near-identical text.

Quotation
- A direct quotation is in English double quotation marks: "". If you set English as the language of the document, it will write the correct quotation marks automatically.
- Quotations are NOT italicised.
- The in-text citation must immediately follow the quoted segment.
- When copying a quote from a different source, you need to unify the formatting and check that all letters and punctuation marks are correct – it must be an exact copy.
- If a part of the quote is not relevant to your argument, use ellipsis (…) to shorten the passage.
- There are rules for quotations within quotations (e.g. direct speech) – see https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/punctuation/quotation_marks/extended_rules_for_quotation_marks.html.
- If you need to modify a quotation (e.g. to fit a sentence structure), you must use square brackets: [].
  Example: According to Kovářová, "[p]lagiarism means using the ideas of others… [and] will not be tolerated" (6).

Long/Block Quotation
- When the quotation is longer than three lines, a block quotation is used. In this case there are no quotation marks and the text is indented on the left margin.
- The paragraph following the block quotation is not indented.
- If you use a longer quote, it should be justified by a longer commentary.

  Example:
  Kovářová claims that
  > whenever the student uses any source, no matter whether they quote it directly, paraphrase or summarize the idea, they must refer to this source properly to avoid plagiarism. Plagiarism means using ideas of others without proper citation. Plagiarism in any form will not be tolerated. (6)

In-text Citations
- MLA uses in-text citations in the format (Author page). Students refer to the author and the exact page where the quotation can be found. There is no comma in between the author's name and the page number.

- Always use the name of the writer who actually wrote the text, and not collection editors, translators, or anyone else.
- To incorporate the citation in the text, place the full stop after the brackets. However, in a long quotation the full stop precedes the brackets (see the examples above).
- If the author's name is mentioned in the sentence, it is not repeated in the citation – see the examples on page 6.
- In the case of short quotations from poems, the individual lines are indicated by using a slash (/), e.g. "line 1 / line 2 / line 3". For more information on in-text citations, including properly citing poetry and drama, see https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_in_text_citations_the_basics.html.

Works Cited
- Whenever you quote primary or secondary sources, a "Works Cited" page must be included at the end of the essay.
- The "Works Cited" page must list all the sources cited in the essay and only the sources cited.
- The sources must be listed alphabetically and according to MLA rules.
- Each entry ends with a full stop.
- The author is the person who wrote the text you are using. If the text has an editor, their name should appear following the title of the text (see the fifth example below). If an article appears in an essay collection edited by someone else, the author is the person who wrote the article, and the name of the editor will similarly appear after the book title.
- Generally speaking, *books, journals,* and *databases* are in italics, while "stories", "poems", and "articles"/"essays" are in quotation marks. Titles of theatre plays are italicised if you are using an edition that only contains a single play, or in quotation marks if they are part of a bigger collection.

   Format and examples (UP stands for "University Press"):

   o **Whole book:**
     Last Name, First Name. *Title of Book*. Publisher, Year of Publication.

     Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1987.

   o **Republished book:**
     Last Name, First Name. *Title of Book*. Year of Original Publication. Publisher, Year of Publication.

     McEwan, Ian. *Black Dogs*. 1992. Vintage, 2008.

   o **E-book:**
     Last Name, First Name. *Title of Book*. E-book ed./Kindle ed., Publisher, Year of Publication.

     Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Kindle ed., Duke UP, 2016.

- A poem/essay in a collection by the same author:
  Last name, First name. "Title of Essay/Poem." *Title of Collection*, Publisher, Year, Page range of entry.

  Bishop, Elizabeth. "The Map." *Complete Poems*, Chatto & Windus, 1991, p. 3.

- Primary source with an editor:
  Last Name, First Name. *Title of Book*, edited by First Name Last Name, Publisher, Year of Publication.

  Shakespeare, William. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, edited by R. A. Foakes, Cambridge UP, 1984.

- Piece in an anthology/collection with an editor (e.g. Norton):
  Last name, First name. "Title of Essay/Poem/Chapter/Whatever." *Title of Collection*, edited by Editor's Name(s), Publisher, Year, Page range of entry.

  Eaglestone, Robert. "Ethics and Agency in Ishiguro's Novels." *The Cambridge Companion to Kazuo Ishiguro*, edited by Andrew Bennet, Cambridge UP, 2023, pp. 187-99.

- Article in an academic journal:
  Last name, First Name. "Title of Article." *Title of Journal*, Volume, Issue, Year, Page range of entry.

  Luce, Dianne C. "Ballard Rising in *Outer Dark*: The Genesis and Early Composition of *Child of God*." *The Cormac McCarthy Journal*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2019, pp. 87-115.

- Article in an academic journal accessed through a database:
  Last name, First Name. "Title of Article." *Title of Journal*, Volume, Issue, Publication Date, Page range of entry. *Database*, DOI/URL. Accessed Date.

  DiMarco, Danette. "Exposing Nude Art: Carol Ann Duffy's Response to Robert Browning." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, vol. 31, no. 3, 1998, pp. 25–39. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44029809. Accessed 18 Feb. 2024.

- Page on a Website:
  Last Name, First Name. "Page Title." *Website Name/Database*, Date of Publication/Last Update (if available), DOI/URL. Accessed Date.

  Caulfield, Jack. "How to Write a Literary Analysis Essay | A Step-by-Step Guide." *Scribbr*, 30 Jan. 2020, https://www.scribbr.com/academic-essay/literary-analysis/. Accessed 18 Feb. 2024.

- Consult
  https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html to find the individual category of the source they cite and cite it accordingly (electronic sources, works with multiple authors, translated books, dictionary entries, etc.).
- Citation generators can be a useful tool, but they are not perfect. You must check each entry to make sure the end result is correct.

Proofreading and Editing
- Proofreading is very important to avoid typing errors and unnecessary mistakes.
- You should try to read your text with fresh eyes.
- When proofreading, try to empathize with your reader and ask questions such as: Are my arguments clear? Do my sentences make sense? Is this paragraph coherent?
- It is important to learn to be critical of your own work.
- Proofreading should also serve to make sure the essay is emotionally neutral.
- When in doubt, students should consult a dictionary.
- Students should use spellcheck. Always.

Glossary
- **Academic essay:** an analysis of a literary text based on an argument and supported by evidence from both primary and secondary sources.
- **Academic style:** a formal and emotionally neutral style which is based on facts.
- **Citation:** a proper reference to works of other authors.
- **Paraphrase:** an idea from a secondary source rephrased by the student.
- **Quotation:** an idea from another text copied exactly in the same words as in the original.
- **Primary source:** the text that is being analysed (novel, short story, poem, etc.)
- **Secondary source/literature:** an academic text which analyses the primary text. Usually a book or an article in an academic journal.
- **Thesis statement:** the student says in one or two sentences what they analyse in the whole essay (e.g. This essay analyses/focuses on…).
- **Topic sentence:** usually the first topic of a paragraph which states the topic of the whole paragraph.

Sources and Useful Links
- Recommended literature:
  Starkey, David. *Academic Writing Now: A Brief Guide for Busy Students.* 2nd ed., Broadview Press, 2022.
- A complete guide on formatting and citations:
  "MLA Formatting and Style Guide." *Purdue OWL*,
  https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/index.html.
- On the process of writing an essay:
  Caulfield, Jack. "How to Write a Literary Analysis Essay | A Step-by-Step Guide." *Scribbr*, 30 Jan. 2020, https://www.scribbr.com/academic-essay/literary-analysis/.
- On transition signals (rather informal source but provides some valuable information):
  "Transition signals." *EAP Foundation*,
  https://www.eapfoundation.com/writing/cohesion/transitions/.

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Model Title Page

Student's name:

Course:

Essay topic:

I declare that this essay is my own work, and I have only used the sources listed on the Works Cited page. I also confirm that no part of this essay was generated by artificial intelligence (AI).

Date: Student's name: