Tutorial Letter 201/1/2018

Foundations in English Literary Studies
ENG1501

Semester 1

Department of English Studies

IMPORTANT INFORMATION:
FEEDBACK AND EXAMINATION GUIDELINES
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1 ASSIGNMENT 01

1.1 Seasons Come to Pass

The instructions for this part of the assignment state that you need to answer the questions in paragraph form. They also state that you need to provide quotations from the poem to support your answers.

What follows below are examples of how you could have answered the questions in the assignment, as well as notes on how to unpack each question before answering it. Although you have already completed this activity, please work through the steps, as this will assist you in preparation for the examination.

1.1 Read lines 1-4 carefully. What do they suggest about the way the speaker views the lives of women?

Step 1: Read the lines mentioned in the question at least two or three times. Make sure that you understand every word in these lines. If a familiar word appears in a unique or unusual way, be sure to find its definition in a dictionary too. Words often have more than one meaning, and it is possible that the meaning used in the poem is one of which you are unaware!

Step 2: Once you understand all the words used in lines 1 to 4, look at the next part of the question: What do the words suggest about the way the speaker views the lives of women? Here it is crucial that you see that this phrase (the ‘lives of women’) is the key part of this question. In your answer, you should thus focus on this aspect of the question, paying particular attention to the first four lines of the poem to substantiate your argument. What do you think the speaker is trying to tell us about the lives of women?

Line 1 explains that ‘[a] woman’s hands always hold something’, and the next line illustrates what a woman often holds with examples – ‘[a] handbag, a vase, a child, a ring, an idea’ (line 2). Each of these examples can be linked to a specific idea about women and what women are expected to do. Think about it: What are the implications of the idea that a woman always holds a handbag? Yes, she may need to carry things around for herself, such as a purse or make-up or a book, but a handbag can also hold things for others, such as tissues, snacks, or medicine. What are the implications of holding a vase? A vase is a decorative object that usually holds flowers, so this example makes us think about women and their relationship with décor, but also about the assumption that women like flowers (or décor). In the poem a woman’s hands also hold a child, which links to an idea about women as caretakers, as mothers. A woman’s hands hold a ring, which links to an idea about women who like to wear jewellery (or are expected to), or women who are expected to marry. Finally, we see that a woman’s hands can also hold an idea. Interestingly, this word appears at the end of the line, which emphasises it. Are women usually expected to have ideas, or is the poet trying to comment on the fact that this is often not the expectation?

What is the implication of the word ‘always’ in line 1? Do you think that the speaker suggests that a woman wants to hold all these things, or that it is expected of her?
Line 3 moves to the speaker’s own situation specifically, in which she says that ‘[m]y hands are tired of holding’. The word ‘tired’ here suggests a link to the word ‘always’ in line 1, indicating that these lines can definitely be related to the idea of expectation: According to the speaker, women are ‘always’ expected to take care of certain things, or to do certain things, but the speaker is tired of this expectation. Instead, she wants her hands to ‘fold themselves’ (line 4) and refrain from doing things for others as is often expected of her.

Step 3: Now that you have unpacked these lines carefully, you are ready to write your answer to this question. Remember that you need to explain the different expectations of women as we have now discovered while linking these to the poem.

Possible answer:

The speaker suggests that the lives of women are beset by the demands of others. The nouns mentioned in line 2 allude to the many roles a woman must play – she may have to go out to work, keep the house neat and attractive, take care of children, look attractive. The last noun, ‘idea’ introduces another aspect of a woman’s life – having ideas. Perhaps this is a veiled comment on the fact that in many circumstances it is not appreciated if women have ideas. The switch to the more specific and personal ‘my hands’ in line 3 and the description of the speaker’s hands as ‘tired’ of these tasks and duties suggest a weariness of spirit, a weighting down of her inner self by all the responsibilities she faces every day as a woman. Her hands ‘simply want to fold themselves’ (line 4) – she wants time and space to sit quietly and do nothing. The speaker wants to escape the constant demands on womanhood.

1.2 Discuss the effect of the contrast between the ‘nun’s empty hands’ (line 5) and the speaker’s own hands that are ‘tired of holding’ (line 3). What does this suggest about the speaker’s state of mind?

Step 1: Start by breaking this question into shorter segments and identifying what each segments asks of you.
- **discuss the effect** – when asked to discuss the effect of something, it is important that you decide what the speaker/poet is trying to achieve in the highlighted section. The rest of the question gives you a hint – ‘the contrast’ – and then two specific examples. Thus, you simply need to be able to explain the contrast between these two examples and what this contrast does in terms of the ‘speaker’s state of mind’
- **the contrast between** – when you see this in a question, take note that you need to compare two things and show how they differ
- **what does this [contrast] suggest about** – this indicates that your answer should be focused on the contrast between the two quoted lines specifically

Step 2: Now integrate your answers to each segment into a paragraph.

Possible answer:

The speaker sees the nun’s ‘empty hands’ (line 5) and for a moment envies their apparent peacefulness and lack of responsibility. In contrast to her own hands that are ‘tired of holding’ (line 3), the nun’s hands appear to be without this burden. The speaker remembers then that of
course the nun has other responsibilities – not perhaps as pressing or as mundane as hers, but pressing spiritual responsibilities nonetheless. However, this envy suggests that the speaker longs for respite from the everyday demands made on her, and the time simply to sit and be still.

1.3.1 Read the explanation of connotation and denotation in Introduction to English Literary Studies (page 53). What is the denotation and the connotation of the word ‘clutched’ in line 5? (Note: Please use the following e-reserve to assist you with this question: Clutch. 2017. Oxford English Dictionary Online. Viewed 30 May 2017, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/34894?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=RXwxe4&>.

Step 1: Find the e-reserve on the library website. There is also a guide on myUnisa to assist you in finding the e-reserve if you have any difficulty in doing so.

Step 2: Tutorial Letter 501 explains on page 31 what the difference is between connotation and denotation. Read these definitions carefully and then list the various connotations and denotations of the word ‘clutched’. Use the dictionary entry to help you with this, as well as your own experience in using this word.

Step 3: Now that you know both the connotation and denotation of the word, think about how the connotation could affect the meaning of the poem.

Possible answer:
‘Clutch’ means to grasp firmly, to clasp. This is its denotation. The connotation of ‘clutch’ lends the word a sense of desperation: one clutches onto something when one is losing one’s grip. This can be understood literally, as in clutching at a tree when one is tumbling down a cliff, as well as metaphorically, as in expressions such as ‘clutching at straws’. This metaphor or idiom suggests that the action is in vain – and this is perhaps the implication in this poem too.

1.3.2 Given this connotation, what do you think that this choice of word here suggests about the speaker and her feelings?

Step 1: This question should be easier, because you already know the connotation of the word ‘clutched’ after answering 1.3.1. For this answer, you need to link the metaphorical or symbolic meanings of the word to the speaker and her emotions in the poem. Why do you think she shows the word ‘clutched’ instead of another word with the same meaning (grabbed/reached/searched for)? The poet may have chosen this word with the possible connotation in mind. She wants us to think of the different meanings of ‘clutched’ as this deepens our understanding of the poem.

Possible answer:
The speaker remembers that the nun ‘clutched God’ (line 6). Given the connotation of ‘clutched’ with things that may be done in vain, this word may suggest a kind of desperation. We feel that
perhaps this reflects the speaker's own feelings about God and the comfort (or lack of) this provides her.

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### 1.4 Discuss what the repetition in lines 3 and 7 suggest about the tone and the mood of the poem. (You may wish to refer to the biography of Eva Bezwoda in *Seasons Come to Pass* to assist you with your interpretation of these lines.)

**Step 1:** If a question suggests that you look at a specific section in one of your prescribed books, this is the first thing you should do.

**Step 2:** Once you have read the recommended section, read through the poem again, focusing on lines 3 and 7. Which words are repeated here?

**Step 3:** Read the definitions of ‘tone’ and ‘mood’ in Tutorial Letter 501 as well as *Introduction to English Literary Studies*. You need to have a clear idea of what these terms refer to before you answer this question.

**Possible answer:**
The biographical note tells us that Bezwoda was concerned about ‘inner suffering’, and that she was a psychologist. The poet was a person who was aware of others’ trials and sufferings, and she may have been empathetic to others based on her occupation. The biographical note also suggests a person who examines her own inner life. Perhaps more telling is the information that she died very young (at the age of 34) and ‘probably’ by suicide, after ‘a long period of depressive illness’. This lends a particular import to the repeated words ‘[m]y hands are tired of holding’. The tone and of the poem is of world-weariness and sadness, as it may evoke what happened to the poet later. The mood of the poem is thus sombre, reflective and perhaps somewhat hopeless.

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### 1.5.1 Read lines 8-10 carefully. The speaker expresses a desire to *disassociate* herself (separate or disconnect from) from her hands. Identify the image that expresses this wish and explain how she uses figures of speech to create the image.

**Step 1:** Identify the image that tells you that the speaker wants to disassociate herself from her hands in lines 8 to 10. Look specifically for an image that links to the speaker's hands.

**Step 2:** Once you have found the image, study it carefully to see what kind of figure of speech is used. Is it a simile? Does she use personification? Is it a metaphor? Why do you say that? If you are unsure, consult Tutorial Letter 501 as well as *Introduction to English Literary Studies* to familiarise yourself with the terms first.

**Possible answer:**
The poet expresses a desire to *disassociate* herself (set herself apart) from her hands in the image ‘I’d gladly let them go, and watch a pair of hands/ Run ownerless through the world/ Scattering cooking pots and flowers and rings’ (lines 8-10). The poet uses personification in this
extended metaphor – she describes her hands as having a life of their own, disassociated from her and running ‘ownerless through the world’, scattering objects and by extension the responsibilities of her life in their wake. The phrase ‘gladly let them go’ (line 8) suggests her sense of relief at being free of her hands, and by implication all the responsibilities her hands are tasked with.

1.5.2 Why do you think that the speaker feels this way?

Step 1: Your answer to this question should be based on your answer to 1.5.1, as well as the overall meaning of the poem.

Step 2: While you should comment on how you think the speaker feels, remember that this comment should be based upon the poem itself. Remember to provide quotations from the poem, and specifically from lines 8 to 10, in answering this question.

Possible answer:

The phrase ‘run ownerless’ (line 9) suggests that the speaker would like to be free and no longer owned by her duties and what society expects from her. This notion is developed in the use of the word ‘scattering’ (line 10), which implies a carelessness and a disregard for what ‘cooking pots and flowers and rings’ represent – perhaps the trappings and demands of married life (‘flowers’ and ‘rings’ might suggest the honeymoon period of early married bliss) and domesticity (‘cooking pots’ could imply the drudgery of domestic life).

1.2 The Road to Mecca

Before you answer this question, read Section 3 in Tutorial Letter 501, focusing especially on pages 90-95, as well as Chapter 4 in Introduction to English Literary Studies. You will find useful explanations to assist you in answering the question in these sections of the learning material.

In Athol Fugard’s The Road to Mecca Helen does not physically travel to the geographical city of Mecca. Instead, she takes a spiritual journey. In an essay of at least five paragraphs, discuss what ‘Mecca’ symbolises for Helen in the play.

In your answer, refer to (1) Mecca as a symbol of artistic expression, (2) Mecca as a symbol of freedom, as well as (3) Mecca as a symbol of spiritual fulfilment.

When planning your assignment, keep the following in mind:

• Geographically, Mecca is a city in Saudi Arabia. In the play, Helen does not physically visit this city. Mecca is a holy city to followers of Islam, but Helen did not convert to the Islamic faith. For her, Mecca is symbolic – you need to be able to explain how and why.
• Do not to confuse the historical figure, Helen Martins, with the character of Helen in the play.
• You may not simply reproduce the summaries in Tutorial Letter 501. We expect to see your own ideas in your essay and your argument must link to the question.
Your essay should have a clear introduction that tells your reader what you will discuss and argue. Your introduction must be linked to the question.

You should develop the argument of your essay in at least three paragraphs that each have a topic sentence and refer to relevant examples in the text throughout. Use the guideline provided in the question, and write one paragraph about each of the ideas. All three paragraphs must be linked to the question.

Your essay must have a clear conclusion that tells your reader what your findings are.

50 marks

Important: You must not use any other sources for this assignment other than those mentioned in the questions. While you should engage with the content in the IELS and Tutorial Letter 501, we do not want you to make use of any other sources. If you are found guilty of copying from an online source, or from another student, your work will not be assessed.

The page limit for this assignment (1.1 and 1.2 together) is six pages in total. If you exceed this limit, you may be penalised.

In answering this question, you should read the instructions carefully and use it a guideline to constructing your essay. The question mentions three specific aspects that you need to discuss in your answer:

1. Mecca as a symbol of artistic expression
2. Mecca as a symbol of freedom
3. Mecca as a symbol of spiritual fulfilment

Therefore, your essay should consist of an introduction, a paragraph on each of these aspects, and a conclusion.

Remember that your introduction must clearly tell your reader what the argument in your essay will be and how you will make your argument. Your introduction should be like a map for your reader to see exactly where your argument will take them.

Below is a sample essay to show you what we expect of you at this level. You could have made a number of points to prove your argument. The answer below is not the only option but should be viewed as a guideline.

Sample essay:

In Athol Fugard’s *The Road to Mecca* Helen does not physically travel to the geographical city of Mecca. Instead, she takes a spiritual journey. After Stefanus, Helen’s husband, passes away, she has a vision that leads her to construct a visual representation of Mecca in her house and her backyard. Her Mecca is very important to her, and it is through her interactions with especially Elsa and Marius that we come to understand why. This essay discusses what Mecca symbolises for Helen in the play, arguing that Mecca symbolises Helen’s artistic expression, her freedom, as well as her idea of spiritual fulfilment.

Helen expresses herself artistically through the creation of her Mecca. She constructs statues of wise men, owls, mermaids, and peacocks that reflect her true self. Helen’s creations are works of ‘pure imagination’ (Fugard, 1985: 36). She explains to Elsa that ideas for creations have ‘to
come to [her] inside like pictures’ (Fugard, 1985: 36) and she states: ‘My Mecca has got a logic of its own, Elsa. Even I don’t properly understand it’ (Fugard, 1985: 36). It is clear that Helen’s creation is extremely personal, and expresses her innermost feelings and desires in an artistic and creative manner.

After Helen’s husband passes away, she is freed from a certain level of social expectation. Helen feels that Stefanus’s death allows her, for the first time in her life, to escape and defy social conventions and expectations. Her experience of personal freedom begins when she no longer attends church every Sunday, as she did when her husband was alive, and extends to living on her own as a widow with only her Mecca to keep her company. Despite being a danger to herself as is evidenced when she almost sets her house on fire with a candle, Helen does not want to move to an old age home, as she expresses to Marius: ‘I can’t reduce my world to a few ornaments in a small room’ (Fugard, 1985: 73). Helen is not only afraid of losing her precious artworks, but also of losing her freedom.

Mecca, for Helen, is also a symbol of spiritual fulfilment. In a conversation with Elsa she says about her creation: ‘This is the best of me, Elsa. This is what I really am […] Nothing, not even my name or my face, is me as much as those Wise Men and their camels travelling to the East, or the light and glitter in this room’ (Fugard, 1985: 35). When Marius urges her to move to the old age home, she says that she is ‘too old [now] for another journey’ (Fugard, 1985: 73) and explains to him and Elsa the spiritual journey she went on the night after her husband was buried. Instead of feeling overwhelmed at becoming a widow, Helen envisioned herself travelling to Mecca, ‘a city of light and colour’ (Fugard, 1985: 72), and it was following this imaginative journey that she began creating her own Mecca. Evidently, Helen’s creation holds spiritual significance for her, as she exclaims: ‘[t]he only reason I have for being alive is my Mecca’ (Fugard, 1985: 35) and ‘[i]f my Mecca is finished, Elsa, then so is my life’ (Fugard, 1985: 47).

This essay has shown that although Helen does not physically travel to the geographical city of Mecca, she embarks on a spiritual journey, creating her own Mecca. This creation not only embodies her artistic expression, but it also symbolises her freedom, as she allows herself to defy social conventions. As such, her Mecca becomes emblematic of her spiritual fulfilment, which explains why it is so important to her.

Bibliography


1.3 Work through the feedback on your first assignment

Remember that assignments are formative rather than summative assessments. This means that you should see your mark as well as the marker’s comments as learning opportunities that inform how you approach the writing of your second assignment.

This feedback letter should be read alongside your marked assignment. If you have not yet received your marked version, you should retrieve a copy of the assignment that you submitted.
• Read the feedback letter carefully, paying specific attention to the sections that deal with essay writing and structure (many students struggle with these items).
• Work through your assignment section by section. For example, look at your introduction and compare it to the information provided on the structure of an introduction in the feedback material.
• Pay attention to the focus of your essay and see particularly whether you have paid enough attention to what the question requires. Use the feedback letter as a guideline in this process.
• Spend some time working on comparing your argument to the argument as presented in the feedback material. Consider the ways in which these guidelines use linking words and linking sentences to scaffold and signpost the argument’s structure.
• Look at the style in which the feedback letter is written and compare it to your own writing:
  o Have you made any spelling or language errors? This should indicate to you that you need to work on your language while you prepare for the exam.
  o Have you quoted correctly? If not, this is something you should pay attention. Note that you will only be required to quote directly in a possible exam question on poetry.
  o Is your writing in the correct academic register? This refers to whether or not you have written in a formal style. Identify areas where you could have improved on this element and keep this in mind as you prepare for the exam.
  o Have you followed academic conventions? Are the titles of the texts indicated correctly? Did you write in the present tense? Are the names of the main characters and authors correct?

It is important not to rush through this process as it is a crucial component of your learning experience. Working through the feedback material carefully will indicate to you to which areas you need to pay particular attention when you begin studying for the exam.

The guidelines on the next page should assist you in understanding how your assignment was marked:
**MARK OUT OF 50 FOR CONTENT/ORGANISATION:**

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<tr>
<th>SCORE</th>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
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| 50–38  | EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD       | Content: focused on assigned topic, thoroughly developed, clearly demonstrating the skills required by the NQF criteria (e.g. familiarity with – recognising and recalling – the subject matter; understanding it; application of this information; analysis, for instance of relationships; evaluation, for example critiquing different approaches).  
Organisation: generating a piece of writing (such as an essay) with ideas clearly stated, succinct, well-organised, logically sequenced, cohesive, and well supported. |
| 37–28  | GOOD TO AVERAGE              | Content: fairly sound demonstration of skills, mostly relevant to topic, lacks detail.  
Organisation: loosely organised, logical but incomplete sequencing and signposting.                                           |
| 27–16  | FAIR TO SHAKY: AT RISK       | Content: not enough substance or relevance, insufficient support for ideas.  
Organisation: ideas confused or disconnected, not enough logical sequencing or development, little signposting. |
| 15–0   | VERY SHAKY                   | Content: not pertinent or not enough material to evaluate OR Plagiarised.  
Organisation: does not communicate, no organisation or not enough material to evaluate.                                      |

**COMMON ERRORS IN ESSAY WRITING**

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<td>Incomplete sentences</td>
<td>Check that all your sentences have finite verbs, and that they do not contain fragments of ideas and are not introduced by transitional words such as ‘which’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong tense</td>
<td>Make sure that you use the present tense whenever you are writing about ‘reality’ in literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concord (subject-verb agreement)</td>
<td>Singular subjects take singular verbs (which often end in -s); plural subjects take plural verbs (which often do not end in -s).</td>
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| Failure to present titles    | Make sure all the titles of books are underlined, or, if you are
correctly using a computer, that you use italics.

Punctuation errors  All brackets and inverted commas must be closed once they have been opened. Sentences must begin with capital letters and end with full stops.

Spelling errors  Look up all misspelt words in a dictionary and make sure you learn the correct spelling.

Lack of logic  Connect each idea to those around it using transition words and phrases, such as ‘in addition’, ‘on the other hand’, ‘but’ and ‘then’.

Re-telling the story  Keep your attention on the topic of the essay and do not tell the story of the novel, play, poem or short story to your marker.

Referencing errors  Make sure that your essay complies with the rules for correct referencing.

As you work through your first assignment, look out for what the marker has identified as significant points on which you can improve. These could include:

Issues relating to content

- Discussion or argument off-topic: This generally means that you have not addressed the specificity of the question
- Response is too vague: Remember that you should always express yourself as clearly and precisely as you can. Often this means that you should pay attention to the way in which you phrase your sentences. Choose words that unambiguously express what you mean and give examples to support your statements
- No link to topic: At each point of your essay, you need to show how your discussion relates to your central argument as well as to what the question requires (below we show you how to address this). You should also be careful when selecting the information you would like to discuss: make sure that you choose information that is not irrelevant or outside of the scope of what the question requires

Issues relating to language

- Spelling: In an assignment, mistakes of this kind should be avoided. Whether you are writing your essay by hand or typing it out on the computer, it is imperative to consult a dictionary or an online spelling resource to ensure that your essay contains no errors. Also make absolutely sure that you spell the names of the characters as well as the titles of the texts correctly
- Word order, sentence structure or incomplete sentences: Students who have difficulties with this aspect of their writing should seek additional learning resources in the library or
A lecturer or e-Tutor might also be able to provide you with exercises you can complete in order to practise these elements of writing:

- Concord: The subject and object of your sentence need to agree. For example, ‘I has two children’ is incorrect, while ‘I have two children’ is correct.

- Punctuation: Students who have difficulties with this aspect of their writing should seek additional learning resources in the library or online. A lecturer might also be able to provide you with exercises you can complete in order to practise this element of your writing.

Should a marker indicate that your language is poor or weak it is your responsibility to seek additional learning resources in the library or online. Remember as well that this module tests your ability to read and respond to texts. Work on developing a habit of reading a variety of texts written English (such as newspapers, magazines, biographies, novels or other popular books). Regular reading is an invaluable tool in teaching correct language usage. Students should avoid ‘sms’ language in every instance.

2 ASSIGNMENT 02

This section explains how you can improve your writing skills and thus your marks for the second assignment. Follow these guidelines to ensure that you are better prepared before you submit your next assignment.

2.1 Make sure that you understand what the assignment question requires

Unfortunately, many students disadvantage themselves by not making sure that they understand what exactly the question means before they begin writing their assignments. This leads to answers that are off-topic and that do not respond to the specificity of the question. To avoid this, you should:

Establish the format of the answer to the question:

- Does the question consist of several shorter sections that each requires responses of a single paragraph, or does the question require that you write a single coherent essay in response?

- Does the question include a quote that you are required to respond to or incorporate in your answer? If so, why do you think the lecturers have chosen this particular quote for the question?

- Read through the question several times and use a pen or a highlighter to identify the key words.

You will be looking for the following:

- If the question mentions particular characters by name, these are the characters on which your response should focus. While you might be permitted to refer to other characters in your answer, remember that you should only do so in order to substantiate the main argument you will be making.
- Identify the themes the question requires you to explore. While questions may be based on any number of themes, you should ensure that you clearly establish which particular theme or position the question wants you to address. Remember it is often not enough to simply reproduce what you know about a theme in a text. You may be required to link a theme to particular characters or elements of fiction or drama specifically.

- Look out for instruction words. These could include:
  - Account for: This means that you are required to give reasons for a particular event, perspective or position.
  - Analyse: To analyse something means to examine it in more detail and identifying key features of a specific idea.
  - Argue: This is the most common instruction word. When you see this word, your essay should present substantiation for or against a particular position (more on this later).
  - Assess: To assess something means to determine how important, useful, valid or effective it is.
  - Compare: To compare something with something else means showing how the things are similar.
  - Contrast: To contrast something means to show how it differs from something else.
  - Discuss: Explain or present both sides of an argument.
  - Evaluate: When you evaluate an idea, you need to show both its strengths and its weaknesses.
  - Examine: This means that you should consider something in detail.
  - Explain: This means that you need to give reasons as to why something is the way it is.
  - Explore: When you explore a certain topic, you investigate a number of the factors or reasons surrounding a particular topic or issue. Usually this will be done in order to argue a specific point.
  - Illustrate: To give reasons for something.
  - Investigate: See “Explore” above.
  - Outline: This means to give the main points of an argument or an idea.

2.2 Plan your work carefully

It takes time and practice to get anything right. A student learning to become a chef would not be able to prepare a perfect dessert without first establishing which ingredients the recipe uses, making sure they understand the recipe’s method, and practicing a few times in order to make sure they know exactly what to do when the time comes to produce the final product. Similarly, you cannot expect to write a perfect essay if you do not plan and prepare carefully.
Planning to write an essay involves:

- Making sure you have read the source material on which the question is set. This includes reading and understanding the poem, novel or play as well as its accompanying section in Tutorial Letter 501.
- Reading the question carefully.
- Spending some time considering how best to go about answering the question.
- Using visual tools such as mind maps to help you organise and understand the structure of your response to the question.
- Drafting a rough outline of what you envision your argument being.
- Identifying examples from the primary source that may help you in substantiating your argument.

2.3 **Understand the structure of an academic essay**

While most academic writers eventually develop their own writing style over time, usually in response to different topics and texts, many undergraduate students submit essays that are poorly structured.

In most cases, our essays on works of literature try to construct and sustain tight arguments, in which we try to prove why our particular ‘reading’ of the novel, poem, or play is a valid one. Your essay should advance a very tightly focused position that responds to the specific requirements of the question.

*Writing an introduction:*

Remember that an introduction is not simply ‘the first paragraph’ of your essay. It is so much more important than that. An introduction is your opportunity to contextualise the essay for readers, state clearly what you are going to be arguing, and give readers a sense of where your essay is going and how you will support your argument. Most good introductions include the following main parts:

- **Contextualisation:** This is where you tell the reader of your essay what it is that you are talking about. You should (1) name the writer, (2) name the text, and (3) provide no more than two or three sentences explaining what the text is about.

- **Thesis statement:** Your introduction must contain a clear statement that indicates what your argument is going to be. While this may be expressed in different ways (depending on the question), the argumentative focus should always be clear to the reader. You may want to include sentences such as ‘In this essay I argue that the novel…’, ‘The essay will show why the play’s representation of…’, or any other similar expression. If you are given an extract, you should also contextualise and link it here.

- **Indicating the structure:** Your introduction should have a few sentences that indicate how you will be arguing your point. In other words, you should very briefly state or discuss what
main ideas you will be ‘unpacking’ in the subsequent paragraphs in the body of the essay. You may want to use the ‘Firstly,…’, ‘Secondly,…’ formulation.

Paragraphs in the body of the essay are ways of arranging information in coherent ways so that they support and provide evidence for the argument that your essay is making. Each paragraph in the body of an essay should focus on a different aspect of the main argument or topic. Each paragraph should also have a single focus and its relevance to the argument that you are making should be very clear.

Writing a paragraph:

A paragraph in the body of an essay should be structured in a way that the ideas develop logically and that the argument is clear throughout:

- The first sentence of any paragraph should indicate what that paragraph will be about. We call this the ‘topic sentence’. Avoid expressions such as ‘This paragraph is about sex and adulthood’. You should rather write: ‘Salinger uses the first person narrative point of view to explore Holden’s relationship to sex’. In this way, readers of your essay will know that you are not only talking about sex but will also know what your particular focus in this paragraph will be.

- While the topic sentence makes a particular claim, the rest of the paragraph then needs to support and ‘prove’ it. Support usually takes one of two forms, either (1) close reading of extracts or (2) analysis of significant moments in the novel.
  - Close readings of a text: You should be able to identify and integrate quotations into grammatically correct sentences. Remember that you always need to discuss quotations and explain how they support the argument you are making. You may want to use phrases such as ‘This comment reveals how…’ or ‘This image is evidence of the way in which the novel…’
  - Analysis of significant moments in a text: You should be able to identify important moments in the text and then discuss them. It is very important that you do not merely retell the story. Instead, you need to analyse the significance of particular moments or characters and show how these relate to the main topic of the question.

- Make sure that all the quotes and examples in the paragraph have been effectively linked to the argument that you are making. To avoid paragraphs that end up being unfocused and irrelevant, you may want to end your paragraph with a sentence that connects the ideas to the broader argument or question.

Writing a conclusion:

Good conclusions might:

- begin with a phrase reflecting that this is the concluding paragraph of the essay such as ’In conclusion,…’ or ‘Finally,…’
- include the name of the writer and the text again
Good conclusions must:

- reiterate the essay’s main argument
- summarise the different points that have been discussed in the body of the essay and briefly show the reader, again, how they support your central claim

Conclusions must not:

- have a heading (of course, there should be no headings in essays on literature)
- introduce new ideas
- include quotations or clichés that are dramatic and/or irrelevant
- make moralistic assertions about society
- exaggerate the claims that you have made
- tell the reader of the essay how much you enjoyed the text

This guide has been informed by the following book:


2.4 Respect academic writing conventions

- The register of your essay should be formal:
  
  o This means that you should never use any abbreviations or contractions: for example, write out “do not” instead of “don’t” and “cannot” instead of “can’t”.
  
  o Do not use any slang whatsoever. “Slang” can be defined as a type of language consisting of words and phrases that are regarded as very informal and that are more common in speech than writing. An example of a sentence that contains slang would be: “Elsa is a super cool chick who likes to hang out with her BFF Helen.” A general rule would be not to use the type of language you would use in a WhatsApp conversation with a friend or on a social media site such as Facebook.
  
  o Do not give your essay any title other than the question number as it appears in your Tutorial Letter 101.
  
  o Do not ever use bullet points when writing a formal academic essay.

- Remember to indicate the titles of poems, plays or novels correctly. The titles of novels or plays should be underlined when handwritten (The Road to Mecca) and italicized when typed (The Road to Mecca). The titles of poems should be placed in inverted commas whether typed or written by hand (“Ingrid Jonker” or “In the Shadow of Signal Hill”).

- A literary analysis should always be written in the present tense. This is because the events or feelings described in a novel, play or poem exist in a special temporal space
which is always present. For example, “Helen had a friend whose name was Elsa” is incorrect while “Helen has a friend whose name is Elsa” is correct.

- When you refer to the author of the novel, poem, or play for the first time, use their full name and surname. Thereafter, only use their surname. We never refer to an author by simply using their first name.

2.5 Quote and reference accurately and correctly

Being able to quote correctly is a crucial skill when writing any academic essay. When writing an assignment, you need to quote from both the primary text and from secondary sources if you are using any. The purpose of quoting from the primary text is to indicate where exactly certain ideas you are discussing can be seen in the text. These quotes could thus be seen as constituting the basic building blocks of your argument. You quote from secondary sources in order to show how the ideas of others either inform or contradict your own opinions. In both cases it is never enough simply to quote without discussing and engaging with that which you are quoting. The important thing to remember is that all quotations must be discussed. Quotes are your ‘evidence’ to support the main point that you are making in the essay and you need to explain why that particular quote is relevant or significant. Students may want to use phrases like ‘this is significant because…’ and ‘this shows the reader that…’ to connect a quote to the main argument. Remember, you should read the assignment instructions carefully to determine whether you need to use any secondary sources.

There are certain academic conventions that one needs to follow when quoting from any source:

- Your quote needs to be placed in a full sentence. When you quote from either a secondary source or from your primary text, you need to ensure that what you are quoting forms part of a coherent and grammatically correct sentence. This means that when you read the final sentence out loud, you should not be able to tell which words form part of the quote and which are your own – together they should make sense as a complete sentence.

- Indicate where your quote comes from by putting the author’s surname and the page number in brackets after the quote.

- You have to retain the wording of the original text. When you place something in quotation marks, it has to remain exactly as it appears in the original text. You cannot change the word order or the tense. So, you should carefully decide which sections of a particular quote you want to use and then structure your sentence around it. Remember that even two or three words can be a suitable quote. Alternatively, you can use square brackets to indicate changes. These changes would normally revolve around pronouns and omissions.

  o Pronouns: To change a pronoun, put the correct words inside square brackets the replace the incorrect one.

  o Omissions: To indicate an omission, put three dots inside square brackets.

- You may use single or double quotation marks when quoting (but be consistent throughout your essay).
You also need to include a list of sources, which should appear in alphabetical order, should come at the end of your essay and should follow the following format (which is called the Harvard Method of Referencing):

- For books: Author’s surname, name. Year of publication (of the specific edition you are using). Title. Place: Publisher.
  

  

- For websites: Name of author or organisation. Year of page’s creation. Title of document. Viewed: Day Month Year. <url>.
  
Websites such as Gradesaver or Sparknotes are not credible academic sources and you should avoid using these at any cost.

It is a punishable offence to pay somebody else to write your assignment for you. The Department is aware of unscrupulous individuals offering their services to students. Even worse, these individuals often promise an individualised service but then submit the same essays for many students. If a lecturer or marker suspects that a student is guilty of this offence, their details will immediately be communicated to the University’s upper management to ensure that the culprit is subjected to disciplinary action.
3  CHECKLIST

Work through the checklist below before you submit your second assignment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have read and understood the relevant learning material in <em>Tutorial Letter 501</em> as well as the prescribed texts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand what the question requires me to do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have contacted my lecturers or my e-tutor for more information on anything I do not understand</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I planned my work carefully, including using visual aids and other tools discussed in <em>Tutorial Letter 101</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my assignment I sustain a coherent and tight argument in response to the question(s)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The quotations that I use are integrated into grammatically coherent and complete sentences</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I have edited my work carefully in order to ensure that I have not made any language or typing errors</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I have acknowledged any secondary sources that I used in writing my assignment both in-text and in a bibliography at the end of each answer according to the Harvard style</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I have numbered the pages of my assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>My name and student number appear on the cover page of my assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>The correct unique assignment number appears on the cover page of my assignment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I have signed and attached a plagiarism declaration (do not send this as a separate document)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I have submitted the correct assignment for the correct module</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>For online submissions: The document I uploaded onto myUnisa can be opened, read, and edited by my lecturers (NOT a read-only file)</td>
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Note that your e-tutors are available via myUnisa to assist you on a regular basis.

Please remember to read ALL your prescribed texts as well as the tutorial letters.

Do try to access the MyUnisa site for ENG 1501 as often as possible. If you have any queries for lecturers, please use the following e-mail address:

ENG1501@unisa.ac.za

Good luck with your studies, and all the best for the second assignment.

THE ENG1501 TEAM