

## Strategies for Drafting + Revising Essays

These are some notes as you work toward your final drafts of Essay 1, as well as strategies that will help with future writing assignments (they apply not only to formal essays and project, but also to blogs and comments in online Class Discussions too). The goal is to get you thinking about the drafting & revision process holistically, and to understand the different components (argument, structure, etc.) that go into creating an effective thesis-driven essay.

I also strongly encourage everyone to review the Essay Assignment & the requirements/expectations, before submitting your final draft. You may also want to review the Writing Resources I provided on our OpenLab course site. And remember, your final draft should be fully revised, and that you should include a reflective (also fully revised) Cover Letter that should be one full page single-spaced.

Here are some more helpful thoughts about drafting / revising:

- Your thesis should be the final sentence of your first paragraph, but you should spend the entire Introduction developing/working up to this final claim (think of it as a “thesis-paragraph,” rather than a thesis “sentence”). Make sure that your Introduction (thesis paragraph) provides an outline (a road map) of your essay/argument. Introduce/define any central key terms/concepts here as well. This first paragraph – the thesis paragraph is key: don’t start with generalities about technology or machines (etc.) or a basic summary of your broad topic or text. The purpose of this paragraph is to introduce readers to your focused/specific argument in relation to the novel. So, here, you should provide only the specific information readers will need to understand your argument in this essay.
- Everyone needs to think about your readers’ expectations. You should assume they have read but not thought carefully about the novel. You need to provide information to guide them through the presentation/discussion/analysis of your argument (don’t just jump right into the middle of things). What information do your readers need, in what order, to understand and be convinced of your thesis?
- Use your topic sentences to lead with your claims (and their significance) instead of just listing a detail/fact from a source. You don’t want your essay to stay in the same place (horizontal); instead you want it to grow and build with each new paragraph. It is crucial that you use transitions, reflect on the links between your various sentences, ideas, and paragraphs. You need to bring something new to your topic (not just re-presenting back facts/observations from the text/s). I know that this can seem like a daunting task for an essay, but remember that synthesizing/integrating all of the information you have found and weaving it together is already a work of intellectual effort (which involves analysis, evaluation, narrative/story-telling, etc.). You want to provide argument and analysis, not merely describe facts.
- Use transitions to connect your ideas. Don’t have ideas jumbled in the same paragraph or merely string quotes together. Evidence (quotes, examples from the text/s) must be clearly introduced, explained, and analyzed. You have to connect the dots for your readers (don’t leave them guessing as to what your point is). Clearly explain the significance of your points (it’s like baking: you might have all the ingredients on the table, but if you don’t know what to do with them, you can’t bake the cake!). Really think about the argument/structure of your essay: what

do your various paragraphs/ideas have to do with each other, other than the fact that they are dealing with the same text or broad general topic? What other deeper, less superficial connections can you highlight for your readers?

- In general, you need to make sure that whatever you write serves a particular purpose in your essay. There are many places where you might make general statements (e.g., merely surviving is not enough) or hint at some larger point but don't actually take the statement to its logical conclusion (ex: memories can be a good or bad thing ... ok ... but how/why?). These sections take up precious space but don't add anything significant to the essay. You have to get to the point you faster, try to completely cut the fluff and then draw out the significance of your points (this is where the "so what?" comes in). Try to avoid fluff, wordiness, repetition, and generality: saying the same thing over and over again in different ways or talking around the text. When you quote, you should comment on/analyze the text rather than merely describing it (move beyond simply providing evidence).
- For Essay 1, the assignment is a close reading of one text (don't bring in outside information or spend time discussing the "real world" or "our society"). Therefore, for an assignment like this, you will need to return to the novel repeatedly as you revise. Why are the parts of the text you chose to discuss in your essay (the evidence) important? Grapple with the ideas. Beware of absolutes/over-simplifications: nuances and complexity are interesting. Remember, you don't have to make a one-sided/absolute argument. What does your approach offer the reader in terms of seeing these text in a new light? Work on presenting a complex, nuanced argument.
- Mostly everyone will need to spend extra time drafting/revising her introduction. But in order to figure out what you are (or are not, in some cases!) saying, you need to go back to the body paragraphs. Then get your argument and put it up front. Then go back and make sure each body paragraph supports this main point with evidence and analysis. Then re-write the conclusion. In fact, if you are having trouble clarifying your argument, look to your conclusion (often things come together there in a first draft, as it is the natural place where everything culminates), but part of your work in revising is to bring that material forward and integrate it throughout (to work on structure). Then check to see (by looking at all of your claims isolated together) if there is development and it makes logical sense. Then revise. Etc. You get it. Writing is recursive, revision, a process. It is ongoing, difficult work. But you can do it!

As you work future writing assignments, you should pay particular attention to:

- The focus/sophistication/clarify/persuasiveness of your argument (both in your opening paragraph and in its development throughout the body of the essay).
- The quality and incorporation of textual evidence (using a mix of summary, paraphrase, quotations, signal phrases, introducing/contextualizing this textual evidence)
- Correct/complete citations (both in-text and Work Cited)
- Sentence-level issues, including proofreading. Nobody should be turning in a final draft with any typos or other similar errors in it. You should revise your draft thoroughly, including reading it out loud to catch any mistakes.