

ENGLISH HANDBOOK



“Welcome to my evil lair...”



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“EVIL”

Welcome to my evil classroom lair. In order to become full-fledged evil “minions,” you need to read this handbook carefully. It explains everything you need to know.

“English,” as you may know, is shorthand for “English Language Arts.” Being that we are in an Arts school, but one where academics must and always do come first, it is important that we approach the subject as what it is: an art form.

How does one study the arts? What exactly do we *do* when we study drawing, sculpture, music, or dance? Well, anyone who has studied the arts will tell you that studying the arts essentially involves two things:

- Learning about, and developing an awareness of and appreciation for, existing works of art in that particular form;
- Developing the skills and techniques associated with the art form, in order to create our own works.

In the case of *language* arts, much like any other art form, we will be studying existing works of art (i.e., reading books, stories and poems), and developing the skills to produce our own (i.e., writing). That’s what English Language Arts is.

We will also be preparing ourselves for New York State’s Regents Comprehensive Examination in English, which we’ll all be taking in June. This two-day, six-hour, four-part exam requires no specific knowledge or content, but it does require the skills to listen, read, understand, respond, interpret, analyze, and of course, write. *Everything* we do in class is designed to develop those skills, and prepare you for that exam.

So, what does that mean to you, the student? It means we’re going to do a lot of reading, a lot of writing, and most importantly, a lot of *thinking*. See, when you reach high school, particularly the upper grades, you should already know how to read and write. You should already be able to read something and then have a pretty good idea what it’s about. You should already be able to write a coherent sentence in proper English. So we shouldn’t have to worry about all that basic, fifth-grade stuff. We’re going to go beyond that, take our thinking to the next level, so we’ll be ready for college when we get there.

Our success is going to depend a lot on you; your willingness to *think* and to build your own understanding of whatever it is we’re reading. “*I don’t get it*” is not an option. The only wrong response is no response at all. It’s up to you to find, create, and build meaning.

Your grade will be based on three things:

- **Notebook (40%):** You will write in your notebook every day (see the next page for more information on required notebook entries), and *leave it in the classroom*. Notebooks will be graded every two weeks according to the **rubric** on page 6 (see also page 8).
- **Writing Projects (40%):** Essays based on the four tasks on the English Regents Exam. These will be graded the same way they’re graded on the actual Regents (see page 7).
- **“MOJO” (20%):** Class participation and conduct (see pages 3-4).



PAGE

“NUMBER TWO”

This page describes an example of what will happen in a typical class period. Actual times and activities will certainly vary from day to day, but this is what you should expect to be doing from the beginning of the period to the end:

First 5 minutes – Write response to “Q”. After you arrive and take your seat, you should immediately open your notebook to your last entry and begin writing your response to the day’s quote, or question, which will be written on the right-hand side of the board. You do *not* have to copy down the quote; you can, but will *not* receive credit for doing so. Label this entry only with the date and the letter “Q” (e.g. 9/14/04 Q), and keep writing until we move on to the next activity. **We will do this every day.**

We will learn, during the first week of school, how to respond to quotes, and just as importantly, how *not* to respond to quotes. You can also visit my website at www.mrbraman.com for detailed discussions of how to respond to both general and literature-based quotes.

Any instructions for class activities will be given during this time.

Next 15-20 minutes - Read. You will be assigned a segment of the text to read during the allotted time. The assignment will be written on the board. Begin reading as soon as the first 5 minutes have passed. Don’t worry if you don’t finish, but try to get through as much as you can so you’ll be prepared for discussion and other activities. (Sometimes, we will skip the reading and have the discussion or other activity for the bulk of the period. Pay attention to instructions, both written and oral.)

Next 5 minutes – Write response to reading (“C” entry). Take a few minutes to write down your thoughts and ideas about what you just read. A response topic and guiding questions may be written on the board. Use these to help guide your response and come up with ideas to write about. Continue writing until instructed to stop. Label this as a separate entry in your classbook (e.g., 9/14/04 C).

Next 10-15 minutes – Discussion/Questions/Activity. Here we will have either small-group or whole-class discussions to address the key issues in the reading. Our written responses will usually guide these discussions. Sometimes I will ask each group, or the entire class, to respond to a specific question; other times I will ask *you* to come up with the questions for discussion; other times I will simply ask the class for thoughts and ideas about the reading. Whatever we do, everyone is expected to participate.

Last 2 minutes – Continue writing “C” entry. Sometimes our discussion or activities may cut into this time, but we need to do a little more writing at the end to incorporate any new ideas we may have come up with during discussion.



“MOJO”

Twenty percent (20%) of your grade is “MOJO.” This refers not only to how you behave and conduct yourself, and how much you participate in class, but to how enthusiastic, mature, dedicated and intelligent you are. Your score can go up or down at any time.

To earn the highest possible “MOJO” score, you need to do all of the following:

- show consistent effort and enthusiasm for whatever it is we are doing;
- keep quiet and attentive during whole-class discussions, lessons, activities, announcements, and any other time when you need to;
- be in your seat *before* the second bell and start your “Q” entry immediately, without having to be asked to do so;
- participate in discussions by raising your hand frequently to offer useful and relevant responses, comments, questions, thoughts and ideas;
- write during writing time, read during reading time, and listen during whole-class discussions and announcements;
- keep your voice very low (*sotto voce* for all you Vocal students) during small-group discussions and writing conferences, so that only the person you’re speaking to can hear you;
- remain on-task during individual and group work;
- be pleasant and respectful to each other and to the teacher;
- refrain from doing anything that might result in the “LASER” (see next page)

Here are the possible MOJO scores, and what they mean:

- 20** – Always present, always on time, always do your work, always pay attention, always participate, always raise your hand to offer intelligent, thoughtful responses and questions, always pleasant, always positive.
- 15** – Always present, always on time, always do your work, always pay attention, always pleasant, always positive, but don’t participate in discussions or volunteer questions and responses.
- 10** – Usually present, occasionally late, sometimes off-task, sometimes inattentive, rarely participate, occasional “LASER” (see next page)
- 5** – Often absent, usually late, usually inattentive or unproductive, occasionally disruptive, generally unpleasant, frequent “LASER” (see next page)
- 0** – Often absent, usually late, always inattentive and/or unproductive, generally disruptive, disrespectful, disagreeable, disinterested or dishonest.*

* - If a student’s behavior is really, *really* bad, I can give a negative “MOJO” score. As of 2007, that’s only happened once.



“LASER”

Anytime I see or hear something I shouldn't, I will use the “LASER.” In other words, I will make a note of what I saw and use those notes to determine your “MOJO” score. Every time you get the “LASER,” you risk losing “MOJO” points.

These are some of the things that, if I see them, will cause me to use the “LASER:”

- eating, drinking, chewing gum, having any food or drink items visible on your desk;
- using electronic devices such as CD, MD or MP3 players, games, etc., or having such devices or headphones visible;
- any use or possession of a cellular phone, PDA or other mobile communication device;
- talking out of turn, socializing, having any conversation unrelated to class during lessons or activities;
- dress code violations; wearing hats or other headwear, jeans, improper shirts or shoes, or generally unkempt or disheveled appearance;
- doing work for other classes, writing personal notes or letters, drawing or any other activity unrelated to class assignments;
- looking through photos, magazines or other outside materials during class;
- personal grooming (doing hair, makeup, etc.) during lessons or activities;
- frequent, excessive requests for room passes, or taking excessive time to return to class when room passes are granted;
- habitual lateness;
- arriving late and causing a disturbance in doing so, interrupting a lesson in progress, distracting other students, etc.;
- sleeping, or appearing to be asleep;
- any overt or disruptive actions, including (but not limited to):
 - verbal or physical fighting;
 - loud outbursts;
 - foul language;
 - leaving the room without permission;
 - leaving your seat at an inappropriate time;
 - defacing or damaging school property;
 - rude, insolent or insubordinate behavior toward the teacher;
 - arguing with the teacher over matters unrelated to course work;
 - any other action that could result in a dean's referral.

Of course, this is not a complete or exclusive list. “LASER” logs will be submitted to the deans, guidance, and administration each week.



Lie #1: “The first marking period doesn’t count.” Your grade average is *cumulative*, meaning your second marking period grade includes both the first and second marking periods, and your third marking period grade covers *all three* marking periods. They *do not* count separately. (See page 9 for more information.)

Lie #2: “An F and a zero are the same thing.” An F is a failing grade but it means you did *something*, just not enough to pass. You do get *some* credit; 18 points out of 40. A zero (0) means you did nothing; you get no credit at all. A zero is much worse than an F.

Lie #3: “At the beginning of the school year, my grade average is 100.” Wrong. This actually *prevents* you from learning. You start with **zero** and earn points by doing your work. The better the work, the more points you get.

Lie #4: “If I don’t do the work now, I can always do ‘extra credit’ later.” There is no “extra credit.” There will be no “extra credit.” Don’t expect it. Don’t ask for it. And there are no “make-ups” either; once I enter the grades, that assignment is over.

Lie #5: “If I have an excuse, I’m not late.” You are late if you are not physically in the room, *for any reason*, when the second bell rings. Having an excuse does not change this simple fact. If you can’t get to class on time, you need to make up for it in other ways.

Lie #6: “If I was absent, I don’t have to do the work for that day.” You are responsible for *all* of the assigned work, whether you are in class or not, whether the absence was excused or not. Entries missing from your notebook will count against your grade, but you may *not* make them up *during class*. You should come in at the end of the day to write the missing entries. (If you take your notebook home, you do so at your own peril...)

Lie #7: “You’re the only teacher who doesn’t let us (chew gum/eat/drink/etc...)” Nice try. Even if it was true, I still wouldn’t allow it in my class.

Lie #8: “We’re allowed to have (cell phones/CD players/etc...) in school.” Don’t let me see them, don’t let me hear them. Keep them in bookbags, pockets, purses, etc., powered off and out of sight.

Lie #9: “Watching the movie is the same as reading the book.” Film and literature are two entirely different art forms, and we are studying the latter, not the former. When you watch a movie, you’re seeing *someone else’s* vision of the story, when the point of reading literature is to create your own.

Lie #10: “It’s not my fault.” Wrong. *It is* your fault.

ASSESSMENT RUBRIC FOR NOTEBOOKS

	Excellent (A)	Good (B)	Fair (C)	Poor (D)
VOLUME: How much writing is present relative to what is required, including responses to daily quotations (“Q”), and daily in-class writing assignments (“C”), and to allotted writing time.	All required entries present, reflecting thorough and substantial responses to both quotes (“Q”) and readings (“C”). The student is clearly working consistently and conscientiously to read the text, and use the writing to explore its meaning.	All required entries present, with an appreciable amount of writing in most “C” entries; some quote responses may be brief or missing. The student is working consistently, reading and writing, but producing less than fully-developed and effective responses.	Entries are either brief or inconsistent; e.g., all or most entries are present, but they tend to be short and indicate that the student is not using all of the writing time to write. Or, existing entries show an appreciable amount of writing, but some required entries are missing.	Many entries missing, with existing entries consistently and exceedingly short, indicating a minimal amount of work. The student has clearly not used the writing time to write consistently, however there <i>is</i> enough work to merit a minimum passing grade.
COMPREHENSION: The degree to which the writing indicates an actual reading of the assigned text, and understanding of its content.	Indicates a thorough, in-depth understanding of the text; the student clearly read it and had little or no difficulty understanding it. Details from the text are copious, specific, accurate and relevant; the student seems completely comfortable and confident in discussing the text and quotes.	Indicates a sound, essential understanding of the text; the student clearly read it and had little difficulty understanding it, though may have had some trouble grasping some of the more complex, advanced, or less-obvious elements. Details from the text are generally accurate and relevant; quote responses are intelligent.	Indicates a simple, basic or partial understanding of the text; the student may have read it but had some difficulty understanding it. Important general ideas are mentioned, but details are few, and references to the text may be vague and/or inaccurate. Quote responses are limited, and some have been left blank.	Indicates a confused or severely limited understanding of the text; the student had significant difficulty comprehending even its most basic, essential elements and may not have read it at all. References to the text are superficial, vague and largely inaccurate.
RESPONSE: The degree to which the writing exhibits thoughtful response, ideas, insight, interpretation and analysis of the assigned reading.	Thoughtful, reflective, insightful entries that explore thoughts and ideas about the text in a meaningful, scholarly way. The student is clearly reading and <i>thinking</i> about the text., exploring larger ideas such as themes, motifs, literary elements, connections to other texts and to the student’s own experience, and more.	Interesting, intelligent entries, but may be limited in scope or exploration of thoughts and ideas. The writing may be more <i>reactive</i> than <i>responsive</i> , indicating some personal feelings about the text and discussing some ideas, with some insight and/or analysis. The student is clearly making an <i>attempt</i> to look beyond the text and explore its greater meaning.	Adequate entries with some ideas, but very limited in scope or exploration of anything beyond the text’s basic meaning. Responses consist primarily of plot summary, with occasional reactions, questions, or brief references to themes or ideas, but the student does not appear to be thinking about the text beyond its most obvious elements.	No response; plot summary only. The student is merely recalling the content of the text, in whatever degree of detail, without applying any original thinking or exploring any larger ideas, themes, questions, or reactions. The writing tells us what the text is basically about, or what it “says,” but nothing more.

ELA REGENTS SCORING

FOR



DUMMIES

How do they figure out your grade on the English Regents? And what does it have to do with how our essays and other writing projects are graded?

The four (yes, **4**) essays on the English Regents are *each* graded on a scale of 1 to 6, based on five “qualities” that are used to judge how well you write. Here’s a simple explanation of the five qualities:

QUALITY:	WHAT THEY WANT TO KNOW IS:
MEANING	Do you know what you’re supposed to do? Do you understand the material you’re writing about?
DEVELOPMENT	Is there enough material in your essay to prove your thesis? Is the material you have <i>relevant</i> ?
ORGANIZATION	Is all the material in its proper place, in paragraphs? Is everything in the proper <i>order</i> ?
LANGUAGE	Are you using precise, advanced, scholarly words? Are you writing sophisticated, complex sentences?
CONVENTIONS	Do you have a lot of mistakes in spelling, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, usage, etc.?

Based on the qualities listed above, the performance levels are:

ELA	CLASS	WHAT IT MEANS IS:
6	A	College-level writing; thorough, fluent, sophisticated, insightful; significantly <i>better</i> than one might expect from a high school student.
5	B	An excellent essay; thorough, thoughtful, precise; accomplishing everything the task requires; advanced high school-level writing.
4	C	A good essay; clear, well-constructed and literate, though not necessarily thorough or precise; average high school-level writing.
3	D	Minimum competence level for high school; simple, basic understanding and skills; good enough to pass.
2	F	Below high-school level; not good enough to pass the Regents. Skills and understanding are limited, lacking competence in most areas.
1	F	Severely limited understanding and skills; essay may be illegible, incomprehensible, barely recognizable as English, off-task or off-topic.
0	0	Essay is left blank (not written at all), or it is entirely copied from a given text, or from another student’s essay.

NOTE: As the Regents is an 11th-grade exam, 10th-grade students will have the standards lowered by one level. In other words, in 10th grade, a score of 5 means a grade of A; 4 = B, 3 = C, 2 = D, 1 = F.

You need to score at least a level **4** on *all four* essays to do well on the Regents.

A few important notes about the grading of notebooks and writing projects:

The notebook receives a **failing grade (“F”)** if:

- a significant number of required entries are blank or missing;
- entries are consistently and significantly short (i.e., no more than a few sentences);
- entries are not responsive to the assigned quotations, reading passages, questions or writing activities;
- any entry is identical to that in another student’s notebook (*both* will fail);
- entries and responses appear to have been drawn (though not copied directly) from secondary source material, rather than an actual reading of the text;
- any other conditions exist which suggest that the student did not actually read the text.

The notebook receives a **zero (no credit)** if:

- it is not in the classroom when notebooks are checked;
- it is empty or practically empty;
- it has no name on it;
- it contains only quotations and notes copied from the board, with no responsive writing by the student;
- any entries (or parts of entries) were **copied directly** from secondary source material.

Final essays will generally be written **in class**, like an exam. If you miss class that day, you must write the essay on your own and hand it in the next day. Arrangements can also be made for you to write the essay during the extra period at the end of the day. See page 10 for more information on writing final essays in class.

Take-home writing projects must be submitted on the due date for full credit. There will be a penalty of **one full letter grade** for any project submitted late. Late submissions will only be accepted for a limited time after the due date.

ROOM PASS POLICY

For reasons concerning school safety and classroom management, I cannot permit unlimited use of the room pass. The following rules and limits are in effect:

- Each student may use the room pass no more than **once per week**.
- Only **one** student may use the room pass in any single class period.
- Room passes may **not** be issued during the first or last ten minutes of class. (School-wide rule)
- All room pass requests will be recorded. Excessive or habitual requests for room passes may result in a lower “MOJO” score (see pp. 3-4).
- Extra room passes for emergencies may be allowed, but they will not be issued automatically and will be duly recorded.
- Students with associated medical conditions must provide a physician’s note on letterhead, with signature.

CUMULATIVE GRADING: EVERYTHING COUNTS.

The grades you get in English for the first, second and third marking periods of each semester will be calculated using *cumulative grading*. What that means is that the marking periods are *not* separate; your grade for each marking period does *not only* reflect the work done in that marking period. The second marking period grade is your average for the *first two* marking periods, not just the second. The third marking period grade is your average for the *entire semester*, from September through January (or February through June), not just the third marking period.

What this also means is that the work you do (or neglect to do) in the first marking period also counts toward your second marking period grade, *and* your third marking period grade. The grades (or zeros) you receive in the first marking period will be averaged in with the grades (or zeros) you receive in the second marking period, for your second marking period grade. The grades (or zeros) you receive in the first marking period *and* the second marking period will be averaged in with the grades (or zeros) you receive in the third marking period, for your third marking period grade.

- **FIRST MARKING PERIOD GRADE:** Average of all grades (and zeros) received for notebooks and writing projects assigned during the first marking period, plus participation and conduct score (“MOJO”).
- **SECOND MARKING PERIOD GRADE:** Average of all grades (and zeros) received for notebooks and writing projects assigned during the *first and second* marking periods, plus participation and conduct score (“MOJO”).
- **THIRD MARKING PERIOD GRADE:** Average of all grades (and zeros) received for notebooks and writing projects assigned during the *first, second, and third* marking periods, plus participation and conduct score (“MOJO”).

EXAMPLE: Let’s say the semester begins on September 5, the first marking period ends on October 16 the second marking period ends on December 1, and the semester ends on January 22. Using this sample calendar:

- Your **first** marking period grade would be for all the work assigned from September 5 to October 16.
- Your **second** marking period grade would be for all the work assigned from September 5 to December 1, **NOT JUST** October 17-December 1.
- Your **third** marking period grade would be for all the work assigned from September 5 to January 22, **NOT JUST** December 2-January 22.

The actual dates of the marking periods will vary from year to year; the cumulative grading policy applies to whatever dates are in effect for the current semester.

RULES FOR WRITING FINAL ESSAYS IN CLASS

- Final essays will be graded according to the standards established by the State of New York for the English Regents exam (see page 7 for more information).
- The grade for a final essay will be entered as a **writing project**. Writing projects count for **40%** of your grade average. Each essay grade you receive will be averaged in with all the others you have received up to that point.
- You will be given one sheet of loose-leaf paper with a printed heading, on which to write the final essay. You *must* write the essay on this sheet. You will receive only *one* (1) printed sheet, although you may request additional blank sheets to continue your essay if needed. If you need to “start over,” draw a box around the text you wish to delete, draw an “X” through it, then write below.
- You will have **one full class period** to write your final essay. No extra time will be given. You *must* hand in the printed sheet at the end of class. Whatever you’ve written on the printed sheet will be graded as your final essay, according to Regents standards.
- The final essay is to be treated as an exam. There is to be *no talking* or discussion during the writing of the final essay. Any conversation among students will be considered cheating and may result in a grade of zero (0).
- You may *not* ask for your paper to be read, marked or corrected during the writing of the final essay.
- You may ask any question to which an oral answer can be provided, except those issues about which you must do your own thinking. You may *not* read any portion of your essay aloud when asking questions.
- You may use any materials which are provided for you, or which you have prepared in advance of the final essay, including exam booklets, handouts, drafts or notes which you have written, dictionaries, etc., when writing your final essay. You may *not*, however, use any secondary source material on the literature when writing a Critical Lens essay.
- In case of absence, there will be **no make-ups** allowed, except in cases of a significant, documented and verified medical emergency. You must **write the essay** on your own and submit it *immediately*. Arrangements can be made, if necessary, for you to write the essay in the classroom at the end of the school day, during the extra period. In any case, **YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE** for making sure I receive your essay.
- Make sure your name is on your final essay. An essay with no name on it will be scored but the writer will receive no credit unless (s)he is identified.

PART II:

ESSAY

WRITING

RESOURCES

REGENTS COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH

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COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH – SESSION ONE, PART A

Plan of Action for Writing the Essay

Step 1. Read the Situation and Task. These will be provided for you in the instructions. Generally, they will tell you what the topic of the speech is, and who or what you are writing the essay for.

Step 2. Listen to the speech and take notes. Don't try to write *everything* down, or use complete sentences, but listen for important ideas and note them in such a way that you can go back and find them later. Use shorthand and abbreviations that you will recognize when you read them. Try to make effective use of vertical and horizontal space.

Step 3. Look over your notes. Fill in blanks, complete shorthand words, see what else you can remember and add. Make additional notations to organize information. Circle or mark with an asterisk (*) or question mark (?) anything you want to be certain to listen for during the second reading.

Step 4. Listen to the speech and take notes a second time. Add, revise, clarify.

Step 5. Determine the *main point* of the speech. What is the speaker essentially trying to tell us about the topic? This single idea will become the **thesis** of your essay.

Step 6. Write the INTRODUCTION (first ¶).

- a. Begin by introducing the topic in a broad, general sense.
- b. Narrow the topic down to the speaker's **main point**.
- c. Conclude the paragraph with a **thesis statement** expressing the main point of the speech.

Step 7. Write the DISCUSSION (2-3 ¶'s or more). How you write the Discussion will depend greatly on the nature of the topic and task, and the information contained in the speech. What you need to do is to break the speech down into a handful of individual, important **issues**, then discuss each issue separately using **specific information from the speech** to illustrate, support, clarify or examine that issue. End each paragraph with a concluding statement about the issue. Generally, each issue will be one paragraph, constructed thusly:

ISSUE → INFORMATION → CONCLUSION.

The more information from the speech you use, the higher your score will likely be, provided the information is accurate and the essay is organized and developed properly. **DO NOT** simply dump your notes into paragraphs at random.

In addition, **DO NOT write your personal thoughts and opinions about the topic.** If you do this, without discussing the content of the speech, your essay will score a **1**. You **must** use the content of the speech to support whatever ideas you present in the essay.

Step 8. Write the CONCLUSION. Without adding any new information, discuss the significance of the topic, and perhaps suggest what the reader should do.

Step 9. Read your essay carefully; revise and edit. Most of the time, on these essays, students score at least a point lower than they might have by neglecting to read what they've written and improve upon it by adding ideas, eliminating irrelevancies and correcting language errors. Reading, revising and editing can add at least a full point to your score (one full letter grade), so it's worth it to take the time and effort to do it.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH – SESSION ONE, PART B

Plan of Action for Writing the Essay

Step 1. Read the Situation and Task. These will be provided for you in the instructions. Generally, they will tell you what the topic of the article is, and who or what you are writing the essay for. The task is different on every exam; it will usually be either a **report** or a **position piece**. Make sure you understand which of these you're being asked to do.

Step 2. Read the article *and* study the graphic. As you do this, what you look for may depend on the task. If the task is a **report**, you are looking for the **main point** of the article and graphic. What are they basically telling us about the topic? Why is it important?

If the task is a **position piece**, then you will be thinking about which **position** (e.g., for or against) you intend to take in your essay. Remember that whatever position you take must be supported by **the information contained in the article and graphic, not your own personal opinions**.

Step 3. Organize supporting facts. In either case, you will be looking for specific **supporting facts** to back up either your idea about the articles' main point, or the position you take on the topic. You can make note of these in the exam booklet or on scrap paper. One way to do this is to establish a handful of separate **issues**, such as distinct **categories** of information within the overall topic, or specific **reasons** why you've taken a particular position. Label (briefly identify) each issue, then fill in specific facts and information that pertain to that issue under each one.

Step 4. Write the INTRODUCTION (first ¶).

- d. Begin by introducing the topic in a broad, general sense.
- e. Narrow the topic down to the article/graphic's **main point**, or the **position** you've taken.
- f. Conclude the paragraph with a **thesis statement** expressing the main point or your position.

Step 5. Write the DISCUSSION (2-3 ¶'s or more). Each issue you established in Step 3 will become one Discussion paragraph. Remember: ISSUE → FACTS → CONCLUSION.

- a. Begin the paragraph by introducing the category or issue in the opening sentence.
- b. Discuss the issue by providing specific facts and information from the texts to illustrate. Be sure the information concerns only the issue being discussed in that paragraph.
- c. End the paragraph with a **concluding sentence** to sum up the information and state its significance to the overall argument.

The more information from the texts you use, the higher your score will likely be, provided the information is accurate and the essay is organized and developed properly. **DO NOT copy directly word-for-word from the article or graphic** without proper citation. If you do this, you may get a **zero (0)** score for the essay. You **must use both the article *and* the graphic**.

Step 6. Write the CONCLUSION. Without adding any new information, discuss the significance of the topic, and perhaps suggest what the reader should do.

Step 7. Read your essay carefully; revise and edit. Most of the time, on these essays, students score at least a point lower than they might have by neglecting to read what they've written and improve upon it by adding ideas, eliminating irrelevancies and correcting language errors. Reading, revising and editing can add at least a full point to your score (one full letter grade), so it's worth it to take the time and effort to do it.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH – SESSION TWO, PART A

Plan of Action for Writing the Essay

- Step 1. Identify the topic.** The Regents instructions will give you the topic, in three places: under Your Task, the text reads: “write a unified essay about...” and later, “develop a controlling idea about...” Whatever word or phrase comes after “about” in each place is the topic. The topic appears again in the first bullet point under Guidelines. While the instructions are always the same, the topic will be different on each Regents exam.
- Step 2. Read the passages** with the topic in mind.
- Step 3. Ask yourself: What do these two passages tell us about the topic?** Your answer to this question will become your **controlling idea**.
- Step 4. Write the INTRODUCTION (first ¶).**
- Begin by introducing and discussing the topic in a broad, general sense.
 - Narrow the topic down to your single controlling idea.
 - The next-to-last sentence should contain the controlling idea.
 - End the paragraph with your **thesis statement**:
[TAG, Passage I] and [TAG, Passage II] both reveal [controlling idea about topic].
- Step 5. Write the first DISCUSSION ¶ (second ¶ of essay).**
- Begin with a brief identification and summary of *one* passage; explain what it is and what it’s basically about in 1-2 sentences.
 - Make a general statement of how the passage supports your thesis.
 - Discuss, in detail, how the piece is written, identifying at least two specific *literary devices* (techniques or elements) that help prove your thesis. In other words, explain how the author’s writing reveals the controlling idea about the topic which is defined in your thesis. Show *how* the piece does what your thesis says it does. You can quote directly from the text, but do so *sparingly*. Don’t quote too much at once, and don’t rely on direct quotes to illustrate your point. In addition, when discussing direct quotes, don’t merely repeat what the text says; illustrate its significance (*why* did you choose to quote those particular words?).
 - The CONCLUDING SENTENCE should make a direct, explicit connection between the passage and your thesis.
- Step 6. Write the second DISCUSSION ¶ (third ¶ of essay).**
Repeat Step 5, writing about the other passage.
- Step 7. Write the CONCLUSION (fourth ¶ of essay).** Read everything you’ve written up to now, and ask yourself: “So?” Your answer becomes your conclusion. In other words, try to find some real-world significance to your discussion of the topic and passages, something the reader can learn from your essay.
- Step 8. Read your essay carefully; revise and edit.** Most of the time, on these essays, students score at least a point lower than they might have by neglecting to read what they’ve written and improve upon it by adding ideas, eliminating irrelevancies and correcting language errors. Reading, revising and editing can add at least a full point to your score (one full letter grade), so it’s worth it to take the time and effort to do it.

ELA REGENTS, SESSION TWO - PART A: RESPONSE ESSAY TOPICS

The instructions on the ELA Regents for Session Two, Part A read as follows:

Your Task:

After you have read the passages and answered the multiple-choice questions, write a unified essay about [the topic] as revealed in the passages. In your essay, use ideas from *both* passages to establish a controlling idea about [the topic]. Using evidence from *each* passage, develop your controlling idea and show how the author uses specific literary elements or techniques to convey that idea.

The instructions will always be the same, but the topic will be different from one Regents to the next. There is no way to predict what the topic, or the accompanying passages, will be. These are the topics that have been used on past Regents exams:

June 2007 – lessons learned
January 2007 – the influence of grandmothers
August 2006 – the natural world
June 2006 – the power of reading
January 2006 – a childhood place
August 2005 – opportunities for learning
June 2005 – parental expectations
January 2005 – the nature of work
August 2004 – the natural environment
June 2004 – things mothers do for their children
January 2004 – life’s transitions
August 2003 – reaching beyond oneself
June 2003 - lessons from childhood
January 2003 – the power of true friendship
August 2002 – the nature of time
June 2002 – the coexistence of humans and computers
January 2002 – the meaning of play
August 2001 – the experience of visiting libraries
June 2001 – the meaning of human dignity
January 2001 – the discovery of beauty
August 2000 – the influence of outside forces on personal growth
June 2000 – the nature of boyhood friendships
January 2000 – the power of nature
August 1999 – mother-daughter relationships
June 1999 – the influence of teachers on the lives of their students

SESSION TWO, PART A: SAMPLE ESSAY WITH INSTRUCTIONAL COMMENTARY

The INTRODUCTION of a literary response essay begins with a general discussion of the topic which is given to you in the instructions. The discussion doesn't necessarily have to take any particular form, but it should explore what the topic is all about and gradually narrow itself down to one single controlling idea, or thesis. Here the topic is "the coexistence of human beings and computers," from the June 2002 Regents. The essay begins with a general statement followed by a pop-culture reference:

Since the 1960s, when computers began to slowly make their way into our daily lives, people have examined the relationship between human beings and computers in both academics and entertainment. The original *Star Trek* television series, for example, repeatedly warned of the dangers of allowing computers to make important decisions for people and societies. In one episode, entitled "The Ultimate Computer," a computer called M5 was placed in command of the starship *Enterprise*, proceeded to kill a few people and nearly wound up destroying all of Starfleet for the sake of its own survival.

The next segment picks up on the cultural reference as an example of a general principle, which is explained and illustrated:

Computers in science fiction stories are often presented as cold, unfeeling, and often indestructible or interminable, i.e., immortal, hence the very opposite of humanity, which inevitably causes conflict between men and machines. In such stories, men usually win, indicating the triumph of independent thought and feeling, as well as the will to survive, over cold, unadulterated logic and the absence of emotional encumbrances.

The next sentence narrows the topic down to a single controlling idea:

Despite the preponderance of computer technology in today's society, and the widely-held belief that they will only become more and more advanced, and more and more integrated into our lives, human beings and computers seem to be an ill-fitting match.

The THESIS STATEMENT goes at the end of the introduction. It provides a full identification of each text (TAG = title, author, genre), and includes a direct and explicit statement of what the two texts reveal about the topic:

Richard Brautigan's poem "All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace," and the untitled short story (Passage II) by the noted science fiction writer Isaac Asimov, both reveal that as computers work their way into our lives, we face the danger of taking that relationship too far.

Note that this is all one paragraph. It is an unusually long introduction; you don't need to discuss the topic in that much depth, but you do need to explore it intelligently, without repeating yourself, and then narrow it down to a single controlling idea.

Each DISCUSSION paragraph needs to introduce the text, tell the reader essentially what it's about, then respond to it in detail to illustrate (a.) how it's written, and (b.) how it proves your thesis, i.e., how you got that idea from reading the piece. Here, the description of what the poem is about is somewhat indirect, but it does give the reader a general sense of what the poet was trying to do, and how the poem relates to the thesis:

Nature is a very common theme in poetry, but computers and nature combined poetically presents a conundrum. Computers, of course, do not occur in nature; they are machines manufactured by human beings. Yet Brautigan's poem seems to suggest that someday they will, a seemingly absurd notion on its surface but thinly veiled as an exaggerated warning of our expanding reliance on computers.

The writer here introduces several literary elements and techniques:

Brautigan's overall theme seems to be that we are progressing toward the point where computers actually *will* occur in nature, that they will replace trees and flowers as well as human beings. The poem's tone is sardonic in a way, professing a certain eagerness for this time to come, yet with an underlying sarcasm pervading the piece, revealed by repeated use of paradoxical expressions and oxymorons.

The next sentences provide specific details to back up the general ideas in the previous two sentences, specifically supporting the writer's statements about the *theme* and *tone* of the poem, and the poet's use of *paradox* and *oxymoron*. Note that the writer quotes directly from the text *sparingly*; only as much as he needs to make the point. The writer's comments on the direct quotations *illustrate their significance*, rather than simply repeat their basic meaning:

Brautigan combines traditional, almost too-familiar, images of nature ("pure water touching clear sky;" "deer stroll peacefully") with paradoxical, almost absurd notions of computers inhabiting the natural world ("a cybernetic meadow / where mammals and computers live together in mutually programming harmony;" "a cybernetic forest / filled with pines and electronics"). Such descriptions may be mildly amusing, but the real warning comes in the final stanza, where Brautigan suggests that the "cybernetic ecology" (an oxymoron) will enable human beings to be "joined back to nature, returned to our mammal brothers and sisters;" in other words, that human beings will essentially become animals in a computer-run world, analogous to the modern relationship of lower-order mammals to a human-run world. The final line, referring to the eponymous "machines of loving grace," is the ultimate paradox, in that machines are certainly not capable of such emotions, although we do psychologically tend to assign higher-order emotions to machines, as we do to animals.

The *concluding sentence* connects the text and the cited details directly to the thesis:

Brautigan may be implying that such thinking is dangerous; he may even be suggesting that computers are becoming the next step in our evolution, the next rung up the Darwinian ladder.

The second DISCUSSION paragraph begins with a transition from the end of the first:

That may very well be, but one universal truth about computers, at least today, is that they can only do what they are programmed to do by human beings; they cannot think independently or creatively or intuitively, which is why they always seem to lose those aforementioned sci-fi battles.

Here is the summary of the second passage, with literary devices introduced:

Asimov, however, uses a first-person narrative point-of-view to make a computer the narrator of his story, thus implicitly endowing a machine with a quality generally reserved for human beings: self-awareness. The machine even has a name, Joe, and therefore by implication a gender (male), and “his” job is to find the perfect woman for his human “colleague,” Milton.

The writer continues to discuss the story and its literary devices:

This self-awareness and gender identification, the personification of an inanimate device, become even more significant later in the story, as the highly particular and emotionally stagnant Milton, frustrated by Joe’s fruitless efforts to find him the perfect mate, programs Joe with an exhaustive and detailed history of his own life and mind, to the point where Milton and Joe literally think alike, and, more disturbingly, become interchangeable. In the end, Joe literally takes Milton’s place as he prepares to welcome the woman he discovered as the perfect mate for Milton, who is now, by extension, essentially the perfect mate for both of them.

Concluding sentence:

Asimov’s clever use of personification through first-person point-of-view provides the same warning as Brautigan’s deeply sardonic poem: that computers are taking over our lives, and if we go too far, they will replace us.

A CONCLUSION can be written any number of ways. Generally, the best way is to read everything you’ve written up to that point and ask yourself, “OK, so what?” Your answer to that question becomes your conclusion:

Computers are extraordinarily useful tools that become more and more versatile, more and more capable, and more and more powerful, every day. Is it really likely that they will “take over the world,” as so many writers, filmmakers and philosophers have suggested? Some would say they already have. Brautigan’s speaker seems to hope that they will, suggesting that the jaded poet is convinced that they will, although Asimov is a bit more cautious; he suggests, probably rightly, that it will ultimately be up to us.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH – SESSION TWO, PART B

Plan of Action for Writing the Essay

Step 1. Read the critical lens.

Step 2. Consider the meaning of the critical lens. Specifically, look for **individual ideas** or topics which are suggested by the statement, and any **relationships between those ideas** which the statement implies. Then, consider which books you have read that might best illustrate the overall concept.

Step 3. Formulate your thesis. What does the critical lens suggest that literature is or does? Your thesis will state that two books fit that description or do that particular thing. **Ignore the instruction to “agree or disagree”** with the critical lens. Your thesis statement, that the two books actually do what the critical lens suggests they do, indicates your agreement. If you “disagree,” then your thesis should state that the books do the opposite thing, or some other thing which makes the critical lens’ suggestion impossible. Either way, the thesis **cannot** contain a negation.

Step 4. Write the INTRODUCTION (first ¶).

- a. Restate the critical lens as a complete sentence: [Author] wrote, “[critical lens].”
- b. Discuss the ideas and relationships suggested by the critical lens. Begin the discussion *directly*; **do not** begin with anything resembling “What this statement means is...” The discussion should take several sentences to explore these ideas and lead to the main, controlling idea. **Do not** merely rephrase or re-word the statement, or attempt to “translate English into English.”
- c. The next-to-last sentence should contain the controlling idea itself.
- d. End the paragraph with your **thesis statement**:
[TAG, first book] and [TAG, second book] both [do what the critical lens suggests].

Step 5. Write the first DISCUSSION ¶ (second ¶ of essay).

- e. Begin with the ESSENTIAL STATEMENT, i.e., a brief identification and summary of the book; explain what it is and what it’s essentially about in 1-2 sentences.
- f. Make a general statement of how the text supports your thesis.
- g. Analyze the book, identifying at least two specific *literary elements* that help prove your thesis. In other words, explain and illustrate how the text does what your thesis says it does. Assume the reader has *not* read the book; provide enough context, but do not write a lengthy plot summary. Always support general contentions with specific textual evidence.
- h. The CONCLUDING SENTENCE should make a direct, explicit connection between the text and your thesis.

Step 6. Write the second DISCUSSION ¶ (third ¶ of essay).

Repeat Step 5, writing about the other book.

Step 7. Write the CONCLUSION (fourth ¶ of essay). Read everything you’ve written up to now, and ask yourself: “So?” Your answer becomes your conclusion. In other words, try to find some real-world significance to your discussion of the topic and passages, something the reader can learn from your essay.

Step 8. Read your essay carefully; revise and edit. Most of the time, students score at least a point lower than they might have by neglecting to read what they’ve written and improve upon it by adding ideas, eliminating irrelevancies and correcting language errors. Reading, revising and editing can add at least a full point to your score (one full letter grade).

ELA REGENTS, SESSION TWO, PART B: CRITICAL LENS STATEMENTS

- June 2007: “For what does it mean to be a hero? It requires you to be prepared to deal with forces larger than yourself.” — Norman Mailer
- January 2007: “The human heart has ever dreamed of a fairer world than the one it knows.”
— Carleton Noyes
- August 2006: “To gain that which is worth having, it may be necessary to lose everything else.”
— Bernadette Devlin
- June 2006: “The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.” — Martin Luther King, Jr.
- January 2006: “All that is literature seeks to communicate power...” — Thomas De Quincey
- August 2005: “I like flawed characters because somewhere in them I see more of the truth.”
— Nicolas Cage
- June 2005: “In this world goodness is destined to be defeated.” — Walker Percy
- January 2005: “The right good book is always a book of travel; it is about a life’s journey.” — H. M. Tomlinson
- August 2004: “A person is a person through other persons...” — Archbishop Desmond Tutu
- June 2004: “In a dark time, the eye begins to see,...” — Theodore Roethke
- January 2004: “Things can happen in some cities and the tale of them will be interesting; the same story laid in another city would be ridiculous.” — Frank Norris
- August 2003: “We do not read novels for improvement or instruction.” — Oliver Wendell Holmes
- June 2003: “Good people ... are good because they’ve come to wisdom through failure.” — William Saroyan
- January 2003: “All literature shows us the power of emotion. It is emotion, not reason, that motivates characters in literature.” — Duff Brenna
- August 2002: “If the literature we are reading does not wake us, why then do we read it? A literary work must be an ice-axe to break the sea frozen inside us.” — Franz Kafka
- June 2002: “The bravest of individuals is the one who obeys his or her conscience.” — J.F. Clarke
- January 2002: “All literature is protest. You can’t name a single literary work that isn’t protest.”
— Richard Wright
- August 2001: “What lasts is what is written. We look to literature to find the essence of an age.”
— Peter Brodie
- June 2001: “All conflict in literature is, in its simplest form, a struggle between good and evil.”
- January 2001: “It is the responsibility of the writer to expose our many grievous faults and failures and to hold up to the light our dark and dangerous dreams, for the purpose of improvement.”
— John Steinbeck
- August 2000: “A story must be exceptional enough to justify its telling; it must have something more unusual to relate than the ordinary experience of every average man and woman.” — Thomas Hardy
- June 2000: “It is not what an author says, but what he or she *whispers*, that is important.” — Logan Pearsall Smith
- January 2000: “When writers write from a place of insight and real caring about the truth, they have the ability to throw the lights on for the reader. — Anne Lamott
- August 1999: “Good literature substitutes for experience which we have not ourselves lived through.” — Alexander Solzhenitsyn
- June 1999: “In literature, evil often triumphs but never conquers.”

SESSION TWO, PART B: SAMPLE ESSAY WITH INSTRUCTIONAL COMMENTARY

The INTRODUCTION of a Critical Lens essay begins with the Critical Lens itself, written as a complete sentence attributing the statement directly to the author, as something he/she *wrote*, not *said*. The identification of the author comes at the *beginning* of the sentence:

J.F. Clarke wrote, “The bravest of individuals is the one who obeys his or her conscience.”

Immediately after the Critical Lens, interpret the statement by discussing, exploring, illustrating, elaborating, etc., the ideas contained in the Critical Lens. (DO NOT begin with “What this statement means is...” or anything of that nature.) The interpretation should follow intelligently and reasonably from the language of the statement, but try to avoid using the same words. It should also be “faithful to the complexity of the statement;” meaning, it should not simply repeat, re-state or re-phrase the Critical Lens. A useful approach is to look for individual ideas, explore each separately, then determine the statement’s overall meaning:

Bravery and courage take many forms, though the conventional perception of these qualities involves a lack of fear in the face of physical danger, or the willingness to confront such danger without regard for one’s own life. However, a person’s life or physical well-being need not necessarily be at stake in order for that person to be considered brave. Conscience, the ability to discern right from wrong and to act upon that, to do what is right, what is virtuous, even in the face of intellectual or emotional opposition, with or without the real or implicit threat of bodily harm, is what truly defines a brave individual.

The interpretation is followed by the *THESIS STATEMENT*, which needs to TAG both texts (Title, Author, Genre) and indicate *specifically* and *directly* what the texts do. It should not make an indirect reference to ideas already mentioned (e.g., “...reveal *this idea*”) and it should absolutely not refer to the Critical Lens itself (“the quote”). The thesis statement is the *last sentence* of the introduction:

Harper Lee’s novel To Kill a Mockingbird and the play Twelve Angry Men by Reginald Rose both reveal that a man’s conscience, his willingness to obey that conscience and do what is right despite the consequences, is what makes him brave.

Each DISCUSSION paragraph begins with an *essential statement*, a brief identification and summary of one text; i.e, what it is and what it's about:

To Kill a Mockingbird is something of a fictional memoir, narrated by the main character Jean Louise (“Scout”) Finch, as an adult remembering the crucial years of her childhood.

The purpose of the analysis is to demonstrate that the thesis statement is true with respect to the text being discussed. This cannot be accomplished in only three or four sentences. Any statement made about the book or any literary element thereof requires *textual evidence* to illustrate and support the statement. In the following passage, the writer discusses the *characterization* of one particular character, and the novel’s narrative *point-of-view*, in order to support the thesis by showing that the character is brave in the way the thesis suggests:

Prominent among her memories is that of her widowed father, Atticus, who is characterized in the novel as a true paragon of virtue; unwaveringly honest, trustworthy, level-headed, reasonable, and certainly brave; a man who always, invariably, does what he believes is right and acts according to those beliefs, and passes those virtues on to Scout and her older brother Jeremy (“Jem”). Though it may be a product of the adult Scout’s somewhat idealized memory of him, Atticus seems almost impossibly virtuous; he possesses no traditionally negative characteristics whatsoever, which is unusual for any literary character, let alone one so prominent in an individual work.

The general ideas mentioned above are supported by the specific textual evidence below, which includes references to the novel’s *structure* and *setting*:

In the main, central storyline that pervades the novel’s generally episodic structure, he defends a young black man against trumped-up rape charges, knowing that despite his client’s obvious innocence, he will lose the case in the predominantly white racist South of the 1930’s. It is revealed in the novel that Atticus *volunteered* for this case, knowing not only that he would lose, but also that he and his children would become the targets of racists and bigots in their small southern town.

Here the writer makes a transition to a second element of the novel, maintaining the paragraph’s focus on the idea of bravery as conscience. The plot details are presented not as mere summary for its own sake, but in support of the thesis:

One person who “targets” them is Mrs. Dubose, a seemingly vicious, mean-spirited, delirious old woman who spouts insults and racial epithets at the Finches, even the children, every time they pass her house. The impulsive pre-adolescent Jem retaliates by attacking the woman’s garden, and Atticus punishes the boy by requiring him to spend time with Mrs. Dubose, reading to her, helping her around the house and generally absorbing her relentless verbal abuse. When she dies, Atticus reveals

to Jem that she had been battling a morphine addiction, that her behavior was a result of her withdrawal symptoms, and that in the end, she overcame and defeated the addiction despite the constant pain and struggle it caused her.

The paragraph's *concluding sentence* makes a direct and explicit connection to the thesis, explaining what the above details have to do with the idea of bravery:

Atticus sought to teach his son that true bravery is not a man with a gun; Jem had seen Atticus shoot a rabid dog earlier in the story, and Atticus wanted to make sure Jem realized, much as Clarke suggested, what bravery truly meant.

Here is the second DISCUSSION paragraph, which begins with a transition from the previous one, referring to one of the key literary devices, *characterization*:

Characterization takes on even greater importance in Twelve Angry Men, a drama about not only the virtues and pitfalls of the jury system, but about group dynamics, character interaction, prejudice, and of course, conscience. The twelve jurors, none of whom are named in the play, all have distinctly different personalities, backgrounds, ideas and ideals with regard not only to the particular defendant whose fate they must decide, but to the jury system and judicial process, their responsibilities as jurors, and the meaning of such legal principles as reasonable doubt and burden of proof.

The textual details discussed below support the general ideas above, and make an implicit connection to the bravery-as-conscience thesis:

The play's two most prominent characters are Juror Eight, a thoughtful, reasonable, enlightened, patient man who is determined to do what is right regardless of what that might be, and Juror Three, an angry, hostile, emotionally scarred bully of a man whose fierce, single-minded determination to convict the defendant overrides any and all other considerations and betrays his innate cowardice.

Further discussion of the characters and story, with additional literary analysis (*character, conflict, parallelism, dramatic symmetry, irony*). Again, plot details are provided not for their own sake, but to illustrate the connection between bravery and conscience which is the main point of the essay:

At the start of deliberations, Juror Eight is the sole dissenter as the jury votes 11-1 to convict; he dissents only because he feels they ought to at least discuss the matter before condemning the defendant to a death sentence. As a result, he is derided by some of the other jurors, particularly Three, Seven (impatient to leave because he has theatre tickets for that night) and Ten (an angry

bigot who sees the defendant only as a poor slum kid of unspecified ethnicity), but Eight maintains his ground, even offering to change his vote if, after some discussion, the other eleven still find the boy guilty. “It takes a great deal of courage to stand alone,” says Juror Nine, an old man worn down and defeated by life, as he rewards Eight’s courage by becoming the first to change his vote. Juror Eight’s loyalty to his own conscience pays off in the end as the boy is ultimately acquitted, but not before Juror Three’s cowardice is similarly revealed. Much as Eight stood alone at the beginning, Three stands alone at the end, and in a neat bit of dramatic symmetry, is told, “It takes a great deal of courage to stand alone.” This line here carries with it a bit of irony, however, as Three’s solitary stance is not the result of any real conviction, conscience or integrity on his part, unlike that of Eight, who in the end turned out to be the only juror never to change his vote. Whether due to a lack of courage to stand alone, a realization of the vacuity of his position, a genuine acknowledgement of the correctness of the not-guilty verdict, or simply pressure from the other jurors, Three chooses not to stand alone and changes his vote to not guilty to end the play.

The *concluding sentence* brings us back to the thesis once again:

Ultimately, though, it was Eight’s brave adherence to his own conscience that saved the defendant from a wrongful conviction.

The CONCLUSION of a Critical Lens essay can take a great many forms. As with the Response essay, it is often effective to read everything you’ve written and ask “OK, so what?” The answer thus becomes the conclusion:

In times such as these, when bravery is often measured by a person’s willingness and ability to either inflict or endure physical harm, we must turn to literature to be reminded that bravery exists in the soul, not the body. A man doesn’t have to rush toward burning office towers or charge into enemy fire in the deserts of Iraq to be brave. Were the hijackers who flew the jetliners into the World Trade Center brave? They probably thought they were, others may still think they were, but according to Clarke, they were not; neither brave enough to realize that what they were doing was profoundly wrong, nor to stop themselves from doing it. Atticus Finch and Juror Eight showed, by obeying their own conscience above the beliefs and objections of others, that they were truly brave and admirable men.

LITERARY DEVICES

Literary devices refers to specific aspects of literature, in the sense of its universal function as an art form which expresses ideas through language, which we can recognize, identify, interpret and/or analyze. Literary devices collectively comprise the art form's components; the means by which authors create meaning through language, and by which readers gain understanding of and appreciation for their works. They also provide a conceptual framework for comparing individual literary works to others, both within and across genres. Both literary elements *and* literary techniques can rightly be called literary devices.

Literary elements refers to particular identifiable characteristics of a *whole text*. They are not “used,” per se, by authors; they represent the elements of storytelling which are common to all literary and narrative forms. For example, every story has a **theme**, every story has a **setting**, every story has a **conflict**, every story is written from a particular **point-of-view**, etc. In order to be discussed legitimately as part of a textual analysis, literary elements must be *specifically identified* for that particular text.

Literary techniques refers to any specific, deliberate constructions or choices of language which an author uses to convey meaning in a particular way. An author's use of a literary technique usually occurs with a single word or phrase, or a particular group of words or phrases, at one single point in a text. Unlike literary elements, literary techniques are *not* necessarily present in *every* text; they represent deliberate, conscious choices by individual authors.

“*Literary terms*” refers to the words themselves with which we identify and designate literary elements and techniques. They are *not* found in literature and they are *not* “used” by authors.

Allegory: Where every aspect of a story is representative, usually symbolic, of something else, usually a larger abstract concept or important historical/geopolitical event.

Lord of the Flies provides a compelling **allegory** of human nature, illustrating the three sides of the psyche through its sharply-defined main characters.

Alliteration: The repetition of consonant sounds within close proximity, usually in consecutive words within the same sentence or line.

Antagonist: Counterpart to the main character and source of a story's main conflict. The person may not be “bad” or “evil” by any conventional moral standard, but he/she opposes the protagonist in a significant way. (Although it is technically a literary element, the term is only useful for identification, as part of a discussion or analysis of **character**; it cannot generally be analyzed by itself.)

Anthropomorphism: Where animals or inanimate objects are portrayed in a story as people, such as by walking, talking, or being given arms, legs, facial features, human locomotion or other anthropoid form. (This technique is often incorrectly called **personification**.)

*The King and Queen of Hearts and their playing-card courtiers comprise only one example of Carroll's extensive use of **anthropomorphism** in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.*

Blank verse: Non-rhyming poetry, usually written in iambic pentameter.

*Most of Shakespeare's dialogue is written in **blank verse**, though it does occasionally rhyme.*

Character: The people who inhabit and take part in a story. When discussing character, as distinct from **characterization**, look to the essential *function* of the character, or of all the characters as a group, in the story as a whole.

*Rather than focus on one particular **character**, Lord assembles a series of brief vignettes and anecdotes involving multiple **characters**, in order to give the reader the broadest possible spectrum of human behavior.*

*Golding uses his main **characters** to represent the different parts of the human psyche, to illustrate mankind's internal struggle between desire, intellect, and conscience.*

Characterization: The author's means of conveying to the reader a character's personality, life history, values, physical attributes, etc. Also refers directly to a description thereof.

*Atticus is **characterized** as an almost impossibly virtuous man, always doing what is right and imparting impeccable moral values to his children.*

Climax: The turning point in a story, at which the end result becomes inevitable, usually where something suddenly goes terribly wrong; the "dramatic high point" of a story. (Although it is technically a literary element, the term is only useful for identification, as part of a discussion or analysis of **structure**; it cannot generally be analyzed by itself.)

*The story reaches its **climax** in Act III, when Mercutio and Tybalt are killed and Romeo is banished from Verona.*

Conflict: A struggle between opposing forces which is the driving force of a story. The outcome of any story provides a resolution of the conflict(s); this is what keeps the reader reading. Conflicts can exist between individual characters, between groups of characters, between a character and society, etc., and can also be purely abstract (i.e., conflicting ideas).

*The **conflict** between the Montagues and Capulets causes Romeo and Juliet to behave irrationally once they fall in love.*

*Jack's priorities are in **conflict** with those of Ralph and Piggy, which causes him to break away from the group.*

*Man-versus-nature is an important **conflict** in The Old Man and the Sea.*

Context: Conditions, including facts, social/historical background, time and place, etc., surrounding a given situation.

*Madame Defarge's actions seem almost reasonable in the **context** of the Revolution.*

Creative license: Exaggeration or alteration of objective facts or reality, for the purpose of enhancing meaning in a fictional context.

*Orwell took some **creative license** with the historical events of the Russian Revolution, in order to clarify the ideological conflicts.*

Dialogue: Where characters speak to one another; may often be used to substitute for exposition.

*Since there is so little stage direction in Shakespeare, many of the characters' thoughts and actions are revealed through **dialogue**.*

Dramatic irony: Where the audience or reader is aware of something important, of which the characters in the story are *not* aware.

*Macbeth responds with disbelief when the weird sisters call him Thane of Cawdor; **ironically**, unbeknownst to him, he had been granted that title by king Duncan in the previous scene.*

Exposition: Where an author interrupts a story in order to explain something, usually to provide important background information.

*The first chapter consists mostly of **exposition**, running down the family's history and describing their living conditions.*

Figurative language: Any use of language where the intended meaning differs from the actual literal meaning of the words themselves. There are many techniques which can rightly be called figurative language, including metaphor, simile, hyperbole, personification, onomatopoeia, verbal irony, and oxymoron. (Related: **figure of speech**)

*The poet makes extensive use of **figurative language**, presenting the speaker's feelings as colors, sounds and flavors.*

Foil: A character who is meant to represent characteristics, values, ideas, etc. which are directly and diametrically opposed to those of another character, usually the protagonist. (Although it is technically a literary element, the term is only useful for identification, as part of a discussion or analysis of **character**; it cannot generally be analyzed by itself.)

*The noble, virtuous father Macduff provides an ideal **foil** for the villainous, childless Macbeth.*

Foreshadowing: Where future events in a story, or perhaps the outcome, are **suggested** by the author before they happen. Foreshadowing can take many forms and be accomplished in many ways, with varying degrees of subtlety. However, if the outcome is deliberately and explicitly revealed early in a story (such as by the use of a narrator or flashback structure), such information does **not** constitute foreshadowing.

Willy's concern for his car foreshadows his eventual means of suicide.

Hyperbole: A description which exaggerates, usually employing extremes and/or superlatives to convey a positive or negative attribute; "hype."

The author uses hyperbole to describe Mr. Smith, calling him "the greatest human being ever to walk the earth."

Iambic pentameter: A poetic meter wherein each line contains ten syllables, as five repetitions of a two-syllable pattern in which the pronunciation emphasis is on the second syllable.

Shakespeare wrote most of his dialogue in iambic pentameter, often having to adjust the order and nature of words to fit the syllable pattern, thus endowing the language with even greater meaning.

Imagery: Language which describes something in detail, using words to substitute for and create sensory stimulation, including visual imagery and sound imagery. Also refers to specific and recurring types of images, such as food imagery and nature imagery. (Not all descriptions can rightly be called imagery; the key is the appeal to and stimulation of specific senses, usually visual. It is often advisable to specify the *type* of imagery being used, and consider the significance of the images themselves, to distinguish imagery from mere description.)

The author's use of visual imagery is impressive; the reader is able to see the island in all its lush, colorful splendor by reading Golding's detailed descriptions.

Irony (a.k.a. **Situational irony**): Where an event occurs which is unexpected, in the sense that it is somehow in absurd or mocking opposition to what would be expected or appropriate. Mere coincidence is generally not ironic; neither is mere surprise, nor are any random or arbitrary occurrences. (Note: Most of the situations in the Alanis Morissette song are *not* ironic at all, which may actually make the song ironic in itself.) See also **Dramatic irony**; **Verbal irony**.

Jem and Scout are saved by Boo Radley, who had ironically been an object of fear and suspicion to them at the beginning of the novel.

Metaphor: A direct relationship where one thing or idea substitutes for another.

Shakespeare often uses light as a metaphor for Juliet; Romeo refers to her as the sun, as "a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear," and as a solitary dove among crows.

Mood: The atmosphere or emotional condition created by the piece, within the setting. Mood refers to the general sense or feeling which the reader is supposed to get from the text; it does *not*, as a literary element, refer to the author's or characters' state of mind. (Note that mood is a literary *element*, not a technique; the mood must therefore be described or identified. It would be incorrect to simply state, "The author *uses* mood.")

*The **mood** of Macbeth is dark, murky and mysterious, creating a sense of fear and uncertainty.*

Motif: A recurring important idea or image. A motif differs from a theme in that it can be expressed as a single word or fragmentary phrase, while a theme usually must be expressed as a complete sentence.

*Blood is an important **motif** in A Tale of Two Cities, appearing numerous times throughout the novel.*

Onomatopoeia: Where sounds are spelled out as words; or, when words describing sounds actually sound like the sounds they describe.

*Remarque uses **onomatopoeia** to suggest the dying soldier's agony, his last gasp described as a "gurgling rattle."*

Oxymoron: A contradiction in terms.

*Romeo describes love using several **oxymorons**, such as "cold fire," "feather of lead" and "sick health," to suggest its contradictory nature.*

Paradox: Where a situation is created which cannot possibly exist, because different elements of it cancel each other out.

*In 1984, "doublethink" refers to the **paradox** where history is changed, and then claimed to have never been changed.*

*A Tale of Two Cities opens with the famous **paradox**, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times."*

Parallelism: Use of similar or identical language, structures, events or ideas in different parts of a text.

*Hobbs' final **strikeout** **parallels** the Whammer's striking out against him at the beginning of the novel.*

Personification (I) Where inanimate objects or abstract concepts are seemingly endowed with human self-awareness; where human thoughts, actions, perceptions and emotions are *directly* attributed to inanimate objects or abstract ideas. (Not to be confused with **anthropomorphism**.)

*Malamud **personifies** Hobbs' bat, giving it a name, Wonderboy, and referring to it using personal pronouns; for example, "**he** went hungry" during Hobbs' batting slump.*

Personification (II) Where an abstract concept, such as a particular human behavior or a force of nature, is represented as a person.

*The Greeks **personified** natural forces as gods; for example, the god Poseidon was the **personification** of the sea and its power over man.*

Plot: Sequence of events in a story. Most literary essay tasks will instruct the writer to “avoid plot summary;” the term is therefore rarely useful for response or critical analysis. When discussing plot, it is generally more useful to consider and analyze its **structure**, rather than simply recapitulate “what happens.”

Point-of-view: The identity of the narrative voice; the person or entity through whom the reader experiences the story. May be third-person (no narrator; abstract narrative voice, omniscient or limited) or first-person (narrated by a character in the story or a direct observer). Point-of-view is a commonly misused term; it does *not* refer to the author’s or characters’ feelings, opinions, perspectives, biases, etc.

*Though it is written in **third-person**, Animal Farm is told from the **limited point-of-view** of the common animals, unaware of what is really happening as the pigs gradually and secretly take over the farm.*

*Writing the story in **first-person point-of-view** enables the reader to experience the soldier’s fear and uncertainty, limiting the narrative to what only he saw, thought and felt during the battle.*

Protagonist: The main character in a story, the one with whom the reader is meant to identify. The person is not necessarily “good” by any conventional moral standard, but he/she is the person in whose plight the reader is most invested. (Although it is technically a literary element, the term is only useful for identification, as part of a discussion or analysis of **character**; it cannot generally be analyzed by itself.)

Repetition: Where a specific word, phrase, or structure is repeated several times, usually in close proximity, to emphasize a particular idea.

*The **repetition** of the words “What if...” at the beginning of each line reinforces the speaker’s confusion and fear.*

Setting: The time and place where a story occurs. The setting can be specific (e.g., New York City in 1930) or ambiguous (e.g., a large urban city during economic hard times). Also refers directly to a description thereof. When discussing or analyzing setting, it is generally insufficient to merely identify the time and place; an analysis of setting should include a discussion of its overall impact on the story and characters.

*The novel is **set** in the South during the racially turbulent 1930’s, when blacks were treated unfairly by the courts.*

*With the island, Golding creates a pristine, isolated and uncorrupted **setting**, in order to show that the boys’ actions result from their own essential nature rather than their environment.*

Simile: An indirect relationship where one thing or idea is described as being similar to another. Similes usually contain the words “like” or “as,” but not always.

*The **simile** in line 10 describes the lunar eclipse: “The moon appeared crimson, like a drop of blood hanging in the sky.”*

The character’s gait is described in the simile: “She hunched and struggled her way down the path, the way an old beggar woman might wander about.”

Speaker: The “voice” of a poem; *not* to be confused with the poet him/herself. Analogous to the narrator in prose fiction.

Structure: The manner in which the various elements of a story are assembled.

*The individual tales are told within the **structure** of the larger framing story, where the 29 travelers gather at the Inn at Southwark on their journey to Canterbury, telling stories to pass the time.*

*The play follows the traditional Shakespearean five-act plot **structure**, with exposition in Act I, development in Act II, the climax or turning point in Act III, falling action in Act IV, and resolution in Act V.*

Symbolism: The use of specific objects or images to represent abstract ideas. This term is commonly misused, describing any and all representational relationships, which in fact are more often metaphorical than symbolic. A **symbol** must be something tangible or visible, while the idea it **symbolizes** must be something abstract or universal. (In other words, a **symbol** must be something you can hold in your hand or draw a picture of, while the idea it symbolizes must be something you *can’t* hold in your hand or draw a picture of.)

*Golding uses **symbols** to represent the various aspects of human nature and civilization as they are revealed in the novel. The conch **symbolizes** order and authority, while its gradual deterioration and ultimate destruction **metaphorically** represent the boys’ collective downfall.*

Theme: The main idea or message conveyed by the piece. A theme should generally be expressed as a complete sentence; an idea expressed by a single word or fragmentary phrase is usually a **motif**.

*Orwell’s **theme** is that absolute power corrupts absolutely.*

*The idea that human beings are essentially brutal, savage creatures provides the central **theme** of the novel.*

Tone: The apparent emotional state, or “attitude,” of the speaker/narrator/narrative voice, as conveyed through the language of the piece. Tone refers *only* to the narrative voice; not to the author or characters. It must be described or identified in order to be analyzed properly; it would be incorrect to simply state, “The author *uses* tone.”

*The poem has a bitter and sardonic **tone**, revealing the speaker’s anger and resentment.*

*The **tone** of Gulliver’s narration is unusually matter-of-fact, as he seems to regard these bizarre and absurd occurrences as ordinary or commonplace.*

Tragedy: Where a story ends with a negative or unfortunate outcome which was essentially avoidable, usually caused by a flaw in the central character’s personality. *Tragedy* is really more of a dramatic genre than a literary element; a play can be referred to as a tragedy, but tragic events in a story are essentially part of the plot, rather than a literary device in themselves. When discussing tragedy, or analyzing a story as tragic, look to the other elements of the story which combine to make it tragic.

Tragic hero/tragic figure: A protagonist who comes to a bad end as a result of his own behavior, usually caused by a specific personality disorder or character flaw. (Although it is technically a literary element, the term is only useful for identification, as part of a discussion or analysis of **character**; it cannot generally be analyzed by itself.)

*Willy Loman is one of the best-known **tragic figures** in American literature, oblivious to and unable to face the reality of his life.*

Tragic flaw: The single characteristic (usually negative) or personality disorder which causes the downfall of the protagonist.

*Othello’s **tragic flaw** is his jealousy, which consumes him so thoroughly that he is driven to murder his wife rather than accept, let alone confirm, her infidelity. (Although it is technically a literary element, the term is only useful for identification, as part of a discussion or analysis of **character**; it cannot generally be analyzed by itself.)*

Verbal irony: Where the meaning of a specific expression is, or is intended to be, the exact opposite of what the words literally mean. (**Sarcasm** is a tone of voice that often accompanies verbal irony, but they are not the same thing.)

*Orwell gives this torture and brainwashing facility the **ironic** title, “Ministry of Love.”*