Guidelines and Advice for Essays—ENG 111: Composition

1. Unless you know otherwise, your essays should be 3-4 pages (750-1,000 words), typed, double-spaced.
2. A good essay requires at least these two things to be effective:

* a strong thesis sentence or central idea about your topic
* adequate support for or development of your thesis sentence.

1. It is helpful to think of your thesis sentence as the answer to the question *What are you trying to prove?* and your supporting (body) paragraphs as the answer to the question *What have you got to go on?* or *Why should we believe you?*
2. A good thesis statement contains a subject (*The play* King Lear) followed by a clearly focused predicate (*dramatizes humankind’s struggle with evil in an indifferent universe*).
3. Here are more examples of effective thesis statements:

* Though he spends half the play as disguised as Mad Tom, Edgar may well be the real hero of *King Lear*.
* The anti-Semitism in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* makes the play almost unreadable for some readers today.
* In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Shakespeare presents his greatest quarreling lovers, Beatrice and Benedick.
* Franco Zeffirelli's film adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* does an admirable job of capturing the spirit of Shakespeare's great early tragedy.
* Shakespeare's greatest comic creations are Bottom, Falstaff, and Dogberry.
* To readers today, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is a kind of Elizabethan sitcom.
* Shakespeare's *Richard II* and *Richard III* portray two different kinds of bad king: one passively bad, the other actively so.
* The plot of *Coriolanus* is political intrigue, but the symbolism suggests a fertility ritual.

1. Use quotations and specific examples to support your assertions. You can say virtually anything you want in an essay, but you must have support for it.
2. When quoting prose, enclose 4 or fewer typed lines in quotation marks within the text of your essay. Indicate page number or act, scene, and line numbers in parentheses at the end of the quotation:

In *Macbeth*, even the comic scenes have grim overtones; for example, the porter at Inverness quips, "But this place is too cold for hell. I'll devil-porter it no further" (2.3.15-16).

1. When quoting 5 or more typed lines of prose, tab in the quoted material and use no quotation marks (unless some appear in the passage you are quoting):

Guilt finally overwhelms Lady Macbeth's sanity:

Out, damned spot! Out, I say! One--two--why then 'tis time to do't. Hell is murky. Fie, my lord! fie! a soldier and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to accompt? Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him? (5.1.32-37)

1. If you borrow words or ideas from a book, a website, or a periodical, use MLA or APA documentation style to cite the material. To fail to cite your sources accurately is to be guilty of plagiarism, a serious academic offense. Let me know if you have any questions about MLA or APA documentation or plagiarism.
2. Briefly, MLA documentation style (used in the arts and humanities) is an in-text system that tells the reader the source of any information that you have borrowed. Here's an example:

**In-text citation (in body of essay):**

In his book *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, Harold Bloom argues that Shakespeare wrote an early, now-lost version of *Hamlet* in the late 1580s (383).

**Works Cited entry (at end of essay):**

Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. Riverhead,

1998.

1. APA documentation style is used in the sciences. Here’s an example:

**In-text citation (in body of essay):**

In his book *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, Bloom (1998) argued that Shakespeare wrote an early, now-lost version of *Hamlet* in the late 1580s (p. 383).

**References entry (at end of essay):**

Bloom, H. (1998). *Shakespeare: The invention of the human*. New York,

NY: Riverhead Books.