**CRITICAL ESSAY CHECKLIST**

**1.** **TITLE:**

\* do you have one? is it capitalized & **not** underlined or in quotation marks?

\* does it suggest the topic to follow?

\* is it sufficiently compelling to draw a reader's attention?

**2.** **INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH:**

\* have you (1) cited the work(s) and author(s)? **Note**: longer works are

underlined or placed in italics, while shorter works (most poems, all short

stories, essays, or articles) have quotation marks around them.

\* have you (2) introduced your topic by briefly establishing some context for your

argument? have you avoided worthless or obvious generalizations?

\* do you have (3) a thesis, a main point you are arguing? can you outline your

essay from looking at your introductory paragraph?

**3.** **THESIS:**

\* is your thesis substantive and worth writing about? is it well-developed? could

you reduce it to one sentence?

\*have you checked to see your thesis is more than a catalogue of ideas? are the

ideas connected by a controlling theme?

\* if you are having difficulty developing your thesis, have you considered use of

the "although...nevertheless...because" construction?

**4.** **BODY PARAGRAPHS:**

\* does each body paragraph have a clear **topic sentence** which contains an idea,

and not plot information? does it occur at the beginning of the paragraph? does it contain one and only one main idea?

\* does each body paragraph directly advance the thesis? is there a direct

relationship between the topic sentence of each body paragraph & thesis?

\* does each sentence in the body paragraph connect directly to the main idea

of the topic sentence? have you avoided plot summarizing?

\* does each paragraph contain proper transition from the previous one? do the

sentences have proper transition?

\* do you provide sufficient **supporting evidence** for your assertions?

does your evidence come from the text(s)? does the chosen evidence

adequately support the desired point?

\* have you included any **quotations** from the text(s)? do you have too many?

have you connected your quotations to your ideas? are the quotations

clearly introduced (including speaker and context) and are they followed

by relevant commentary or close reading? have you followed the

rules for incorporating quotations into the text? do you know what they

are?

**5.** **CONCLUSION:**

\*is your conclusion more than a rehashing of your introductory paragraph?

\* have you established a larger context for the specific thesis you've just proved?

have you made connections outward?

\* have you checked to see if you need to revise your thesis now that you have

completed your argument?

**SPECIFIC WRITING WEAKNESSES TO LOOK FOR:**

**GRAMMAR:** have you looked for:

\* comma splices? unnecessary commas? missing commas?

\* run-on-sentences? sentence fragments?

\* missing apostrophes? misplaced apostrophes?

\* verb/subject agreement?

\* ambiguous pronoun references?

\* spelling errors?

\* punctuation errors?

\* dangling or misplaced modifiers?

\* needless tense changes?

**STYLE:**

\* is your writing fluid? have you read your paper aloud?

\* is there variety in sentence pattern and length to make your style lively?

\* have you avoided wordiness? have you repeated the same ideas in

different spots?

\* have you used strong verbs? active voice?

\* have you avoided using language which is abstract, elaborate, or ornate?

\* have you avoided the use of slang? clichés? colloquialisms? jargon?

\* have you avoided passive constructions which weaken your paper?

\* have you remembered to use the present tense when discussing literature?

\* have you avoided needless tense changes?

\* have you used the third person? (have you avoided use of the first person

unless your teacher permits you to do so?)

\* is the tone appropriate for the subject, your purpose, and the reader?

**FINAL QUESTIONS:**

\* Have you written more than one draft? Are you sure that your thesis is in the

introductory paragraph and not the conclusion?

\* Have you **proofread** your paper before submission? (No reader will

take seriously the ideas of someone who seems not to know the basics of

grammar, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure.)

\* Have you avoided repeating the same old mistakes of your previous papers?

\* If you have used **outside sources**, have you identified them? If you have

any (!) doubts, have you discussed them with your teacher? Did your

teacher permit you to use outside sources for the writing assignment?