Department of English Literature

Advice on Essay Writing for Students on English Literature Modules
A. Taking Notes from Critical Texts

Taking notes from critical texts is a useful way of reminding yourself of what you have read and of gathering materials for an essay or dissertation. When reading a book or article, it is best to make notes in your own words, unless you come across a particularly important passage, or a phrase where the author puts his or her argument in a particularly clear way, and you want to copy the exact wording into your notes. If you do so, make sure you indicate clearly to yourself, by a foolproof method such as inverted commas, or a different coloured pen, where you have copied out passages or expressions from any source. Always note the page number of the material you have copied, and check that you have noted down the full details of the book and article from which it comes. If you use the quotation you have copied in your essay, make sure it is enclosed with quotations marks and fully referenced. In using material from secondary critical texts, always try to identify the argument of the critic and distinguish your own position and argument from that of the critics you are using.

NB: Careless note-taking may lead to inadvertent plagiarism which is a form of cheating. For a full definition of plagiarism and advice, see the Handbook for English Students on plagiarism, or the plagiarism advice leaflet from the department.

B. Writing Coursework and Assessed Essays

Essay writing is a skill which can take time to develop, and will certainly take practice to perfect. If you want to improve your writing, there are a variety of resources available. You may find it helpful to consult a guide to essay writing and academic work. Examples include:

- Jeanne Godfrey, How to Use Your Reading in Your Essays (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)

Guidance is also available from the Study Advice website: http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/studyadvice

Here you will be able to access study guides, attend a workshop on study skills and essay writing, or book a confidential advice session with one of the trained and friendly advisers.

In the Department, the Royal Literary Fund Fellow is available to work with students individually to help develop their academic writing. For information on the Royal Literary Fund Fellow’s availability and how to make an appointment, please see the English Student Handbook or the Departmental notice-board, or visit the ‘Information for English Literature Students’ organization on Blackboard.
When writing essays, here are some general tips to bear in mind:

- Every essay should present an argument in response to the essay question. Think about how you can construct a coherent argument to respond to the question or topic selected, rather than simply presenting a series of disconnected points, or a list of examples.

- There is no single ‘perfect answer’ that your tutor is expecting in your essay, because we are asking you to develop your skills in presenting reasoned arguments. There are various different ways in which the question might be addressed, and you need to choose one that will enable you to present a convincing response to the question within the word limit set for the assignment. Consult the department’s marking criteria (in the English Handbook, or in the ‘Understanding Feedback’ leaflet, for more information on what we hope to see in your written work.

- Take care to plan your essay so that your argument has a clear structure. The following points will help you think about structure of your argument:
  - Plan the essay overall: you should have a strong introduction, a clearly developed argument over the middle section and a strong conclusion that recapitulates your main argument.
  - Consider how the argument develops between each paragraph. Every paragraph should make and develop one main point. Each paragraph should build on the point made in the one before, so think about the progression and the links between each paragraph. The same is true within paragraphs: every sentence should build from what was said in the last, so think about the progression between each sentence.

- Always write analytically, rather than descriptively or narratively. You can assume that your tutor knows the text you are discussing, so there is no need to recapitulate the plot of a novel, or paraphrase a poem. What you cannot assume is that your tutor has insight into your own thought-processes, so it is vital that you articulate every detail of your observations and every stage of your argument.

- Try to think independently and develop your own critical voice: be respectful of, but not too deferential towards, the opinions of other critics. When using critics, you should not take their arguments over wholesale. Try to differentiate your argument and contribution from theirs, and be prepared to question the ‘facts’ they provide.

- Try reading your essay out loud (to yourself, or to a sympathetic fellow student). This is a very effective way of gauging how clear, fluent and persuasive your prose is.

- Print out at least one draft copy for proof-reading, and for checking the general presentation.

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C. General Matters of Presentation

The presentation of your academic work is very important. All essays, including non-assessed essays, must confirm to the following guidelines, and will be penalised for poor presentation. It is better to get into good habits at any early stage and to follow these guidelines in all of your written work.

**Name, title and page numbers.** Check the essay rubric before putting your name on the first page of assessed work; non-assessed work should have your name marked clearly on the front
page. Give the topic/question in full at the head of the essay. Number all pages and attach them together securely and in the right order.

**Margins and spacing.** Use only one side of the paper, and leave adequate margins around each page (at least 2.5cm at top, sides and bottom) for your tutor to make comments. Use 1.5 or double-spacing throughout, except for indented quotations (see D2 (b) below). Indent the start of each new paragraph about 1.5 cm from the left-hand margin. (It is not necessary to leave an extra line of space between paragraphs.)

**Spelling and punctuation.** Always proof-read your essay before printing it for submission, and check for spelling and typographical errors. Remember that a computer spell-check cannot be relied on to eliminate careless mistakes. Proof-reading a printed copy of the essay is much easier, and more likely to reveal errors, than trying to proofread on screen. Consult a dictionary if you are unsure about the meaning or spelling of a word. See G and H below for guidance on punctuation and resources to help improve spelling, punctuation and grammar.

**Titles.** Italicize the titles of large works: novels, critical books, plays, periodicals, etc. For example: Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*, C. L. Barber’s *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy*, the journal *Critical Quarterly*. Do not use quotation marks for such titles. In handwritten essays (such as exam answers), titles of large works should be underlined. In word-processed essays, you may choose to underline titles if you prefer, but be consistent: do not mix the two practices. Use quotation marks (not italics) for the titles of shorter works: individual poems, stories, essays, chapters or journal articles, e.g. Blake’s poem “The Tyger”; James Joyce’s story “The Dead” in *Dubliners*; Leo Bersani’s essay “The Jamesian Lie” in the periodical *Partisan Review*.

**Quotation marks.** You may use either double quotation marks as above (“…” or single quotation marks (‘…’), but be consistent throughout your essay: do not chop and change between the two types. This applies both to the punctuation that indicates a title (e.g. “The Tyger”) and to the punctuation around a passage quoted from the text (“Tyger, Tyger, burning bright”). Wherever double quotation marks appear in this Guide, singles could be used instead – it does not matter which convention you employ, provided you stick to it. The only time you can use both single and double quotation marks in an essay is explained below.

### D. Using Quotations

**Quote accurately**

- If you omit some material from within a quoted passage, indicate the omission with an ellipsis (a row of three spaced dots: …). Do not use ellipses at either the beginning or the end of a quotation.
- Ensure that the quotation makes sense as it stands. If you need to change a quotation to clarify the meaning or to ensure that it fits grammatically with the lead-in sentence, you can do so, provided that you indicate the change in square brackets (see examples below).

**Long quotations:**

- If you quote any passage of poetry longer than three lines, or any prose extract of more than 30 words, always begin the quotation on a new line and indent the whole quotation from the margin, without quotation marks. The sentence that leads into the quoted passage should indicate what the passage is intended to illustrate, and should usually end with a
colon. The same layout conventions apply whether your quotation is from a secondary critical source or from a primary text. For example:

- In Book III of *Joseph Andrews* Fielding explicitly announces the moral agenda that underlies his satiric technique:
  
  I describe not men, but manners; not an individual, but a species … [I seek] not to expose one pitiful wretch to the small and contemptible circle of his acquaintances; but to hold the glass to thousands in their closets, that they may contemplate their deformity, and endeavour to reduce it. (pp. 218-9)

- Indented quotations should be single-spaced. This allows the quoted passage to be immediately distinguishable from the text of your surrounding discussion.

- When quoting several lines of poetry, always retain the line divisions of the original text.

- Where appropriate, give the page reference in parenthesis at the end of the quotation.

- After an indented quotation, always re-start your discussion with a new sentence. Do not insert a long quotation into the middle of a sentence.

**Short quotations:**

- If you quote just a phrase or a short passage of prose, do not indent the quotation, and do not begin the quotation on a new line. Instead, integrate it smoothly and grammatically into the run of your sentence, and enclose it within quotation marks. For example (using parts of the passage quoted above):
  
  In Book III of *Joseph Andrews* Fielding explains that his aim is to “describe not men, but manners.” He is less concerned with ridiculing a specific individual than with “hold[ing] the glass to thousands in their closets.”

- Similarly, if you are quoting only a line or two of poetry, do not indent the quotation from the margin. Integrate it into the surrounding sentence, using quotation marks. If the quotation includes a line break, this should be marked with an oblique stroke (/), e.g.:

  > When the disillusioned speaker in Blake’s “Garden of Love” returns to his childhood playground, he finds it “filled with graves, / And tomb-stones where flowers should be.”

**Quotations within quotations:**

You will need to use double *and* single quotations marks *only* when the quoted passage actually includes direct speech or an embedded quotation. In these rare cases, the embedded speech (the quote within the quote) is indicated by whichever form of quotation mark is *not* used in the rest of the essay: if you have used doubles throughout, change to singles for the embedded quotation, and vice versa, e.g.:

- **either:** According to *The Ladies Home Journal* of 1939, “women are much more intelligent than the stereotype of ‘the average housewife’ would suggest.”

- **or:** According to *The Ladies Home Journal* of 1939, ‘women are much more intelligent than the stereotype of “the average housewife” would suggest.’

**Quoting Poetry:**

For short quotations (no more than two lines), the quotation should be integrated into the sentence but set off with inverted commas. *The break in the lines should be represented with a slash.*
E.g.: Milton’s description of Adam and Eve as ‘erect and tall, / Godlike erect, with native Honour clad’ (IV. 288-9) must be the starting point for any argument about the representation of gender in Paradise Lost.

If the quotation makes up a complete clause by itself (i.e., if the quotation could make sense as a sentence on its own) then you need to introduce it with a colon.

E.g.: For this reason, Marvell argues: “’Tis Madness to resist or blame / The force of angry Heaven’s flame’ (ll. 25-6).

Quotations of three lines of poetry or more should be introduced with a colon and should start on a new line with the margin indented. The line endings must be retained, as shown in the edition you are quoting. DO NOT put the lines following each other like prose. Quotations should be single spaced, unlike the rest of your essay. You do not need inverted commas when the quotation is on a separate, indented line.

E.g.: Critics have often commented on the sense of drama in the opening lines of Donne’s ‘The Sun Rising’:

Busy old fool, unruly sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows, and through curtains call on us?
Must to thy motions lovers’ seasons run?
Saucy pendantic wretch, go chide
Late school-boys, and sour prentices. (ll. 1-6)

Quoting Prose:
Unlike poetry, prose does not have standard line numbers. This means that the page number in the edition that you are using is the only way you can refer to a particular section. Because every edition is paginated differently, it is very important that you add a footnote saying what edition you are using after the first quotation from the text. This means that subsequent references to the text need only give the page reference in brackets immediately after the quotation.

Quoting Drama:
If the quotation from the play is in verse, then you should follow the advice above for formatting poetry quotations; if the lines are in prose, follow the advice for prose. The only different is the method used for citing the quotation. Quotations from drama are cited by the act, scene and line numbers (or just scene and line numbers, if the play is not divided into acts). All three must be given if the dramatist has provided all three. This can be done in two ways: using Roman or Arabic numerals. For Roman numbers, a capital is used for the act (I.), a small letter for the scene (iv.) and Arabic numerals for the lines (39).

E.g.: When Hamlet exclaims, ‘Angels and ministers of grace defend us!’ (I.iv.20) the audience is made aware of the terror of the Ghost’s appearance.

For Arabic numbers (the more modern system), all three numbers are given in Arabic numerals.

E.g.: When Hamlet exclaims, ‘Angels and ministers of grace defend us!’ (1.4.20) the audience is made aware of the terror of the Ghost’s appearance.
Act, scene and line numbers are given because they usually do not vary between editions. Nonetheless, the first time you quote from the text, you should put the full bibliographical details of the edition you are using in a footnote; thereafter, you need only give the act, scene and line reference in brackets in the text.

**Dramatic dialogue**

If you are quoting a section of dialogue, you must include the speech prefixes to show which character says which lines. These speech prefixes (i.e. the characters’ names) should be separated from their lines by a colon.

**e.g.** Horatio: Look, my lord, it comes.

Hamlet: Angels and minsters of grace defend us! (I.iv.20)

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**Remember:**

When quoting poetry, give the line numbers, with ‘l’ (one line quotation) or ‘ll’ (more than one line) before the number.

When quoting prose, give page numbers to the edition you have used, with ‘p.’ (one page) or ‘pp.’ (more than one page) before the number.

When quoting drama, give the act, scene and line numbers (see above).

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**E. Citations and References**

Whenever you quote from or cite a secondary source in your own work, you must provide a reference to show where the quotation or citation comes from. The object is to identify your critical sources in such a way that a reader can locate them. This is usually done in the form of footnotes (given at the bottom of the page) or endnotes (which are grouped together at the end of the essay). For most academic essays, footnotes are preferable to endnotes.

There are several different systems of referencing available (e.g. Harvard, Chicago, MLA). The most common system used in the arts and humanities in the UK is that of the Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA). The MHRA publishes the MHRA Style Guide, which is available as a free download from their website: [http://www.mhra.org.uk/Publications/Books/StyleGuide/downloads.html](http://www.mhra.org.uk/Publications/Books/StyleGuide/downloads.html).

The form of referencing described below is based on the MHRA system and you should follow it when submitting assessed work.

**Primary texts:**

**Citations.** The first time you cite a primary text, you should give a full reference in a footnote, to show the edition of the text you are using and the location of the reference. Citations to primary texts should supply the following information (in the following order): name of author; title of work (in italics); place of publication, name of the publisher and date of publication (in parentheses, i.e. brackets). At the end, give the reference to the page (if it is prose), lines (if it is poetry) or act, scene and lines (if it is drama) that you are citing.
**Subsequent references.** If you are going to refer to this edition regularly in your essay, then you can add to this first footnote a statement to that effect (e.g.: “All further references will be to this edition and will be given in the footnotes” or “will be given in parentheses”). See example 1 below.

**For subsequent quotations from the same text,** you can use either a simple page reference (p. 336), or a short title and page number (*Huck Finn*, p. 336). With long poems and plays, provide whatever section or line details are necessary to identify the quotation (e.g. *Prelude*, X. 692, *Much Ado*, IV. i. 164-6). You can choose whether to supply this information in a footnote, or in parentheses directly after the quotation. See example 9 below.

**Edited and/or translated texts.** Citations to edited or translated texts should supply (in the following order): name of author; the title of the work (in italics); name of editor and/or translator preceded by “ed. by” or “trans. by” as appropriate; place of publication, name of the publisher and date of publication (in parentheses); number of page referred to. See example 8 below.

**Referencing anonymous and untitled poems:** When referencing an anonymous poem in your footnotes, use ‘Anon.’ instead of the author’s name. In the text of your essay, you should refer to it by its title. **Poems without titles** should not be given titles. When discussing them in the text of your essay, the first phrase or line of the poem should be given, in inverted commas, in place of a title. In the footnote reference, give the first line in inverted commas. (e.g.: Anon., ‘Miri it is while sumar ilast?’ *Department of English Language & Literature, Selected Medieval Lyrics*, p. 3.)

**Secondary texts:**

**General citations.** You must always acknowledge your critical sources. Footnotes or endnotes and parenthetical references should be used (see below), but it is good practice to supplement these with an acknowledgement in the body of your essay. The most natural way to do this is to mention the critic whose ideas you are using as you go along: ‘As C.L. Barber points out …’; ‘according to F.R. Leavis …’; ‘A different perspective is offered by Jacqueline Rose, who argues that …’, etc.

**Positioning and sequence.** Footnote or endnote references are signalled with a superscript number placed immediately after the quotation, and must be numbered consecutively throughout the essay, e.g:

> Explaining the distinction between “story” and “plot”, E.M. Forster defines the former as “a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence.”

**Books.** Citations of books should supply (in the following order): the author’s name; the title of the work (in italics); the place of publication, the publisher, and the date of publication (in parentheses); and the page number referred to (preceded by “p.” for a single page or “pp.” for multiple pages). See example 2 below.

**Articles in journals.** Citations of articles in journals should supply (in the following order): the author’s name; the title of the article (in quotation marks); the title of the journal (in italics); the volume number; the year of publication (in parentheses, unless no volume number is available); the first and last page number of the article cited (not preceded by “pp.”); and the page referred to (in parentheses). See example 3 below.
Chapters or articles in books. Citations of chapters or articles in books should supply (in the following order): the author’s name; the title of the article or chapter (in quotation marks); the title of the publication (in italics), preceded by “in”; the name of the editor/s, preceded by “ed. by”; the place of publication, the publisher, and the date of publication (in parentheses); and the page number/s referred to (preceded by “p.” or “pp.”). The full page references of the chapter or article may also be given. See example 4 below.

Articles in newspapers or magazines. Citations of articles in newspapers or magazines should supply (in the following order): the author’s name; the title of the article (in quotation marks); the title of the publication (in italics); the date of publication; and the page number referred to (preceded by “pp.” or “p.”). See example 5 below.

Online publications. There are two types of publications available electronically, and the citation conventions are different for each.

The first type is an electronic copy of material that was first published in paper form. You can usually recognise these publications because they take the form of ‘.pdf’ files (‘Adobe’ is the most software most commonly used) and the file opens to look like the pages of a book or journals. The material available to you on JSTOR or Project Muse (see Library a-z of electronic resources) and the e-book versions of the ‘Cambridge Companion’ series are all publications that were released in print and the electronic version merely copies the printed page. The publication conventions used by these publications is the same as for printed books, and they should be cited in that way, followed by details of the electronic version (the DOI) (see example 6 below).

The second sort of online publication is one where the material was first published electronically, and it follows the format of a webpage. You will see this from the layout of the essay on the screen: it may have hyperlinks to footnote references (instead of at the bottom of the page) or to the various chapters or different entries in the resource; it is unlikely to give clearly marked page numbers; it may give the date when the entry was last revised, rather than a date of publication. For these publications you should supply (in the following order): the author’s name; the title of the item or the page that you are citing (in quotation marks; this is important because it provides the exact location of the passage cited); the title of the project/resource (usually found on the Homepage); the URL of the homepage (in parentheses); the date of access (in square brackets). See example 7 below.

Sample footnotes or endnote references:

1. Seamus Heaney, *New Selected Poems 1966–1987* (London: Faber, 1990), p. 17. All further references to this text are from this edition and are given parenthetically in the essay.
5. William Rees-Mogg, ‘This was the war that shaped our world’, *The Times*, 27 July 2009, p. 20.
F. Bibliography

All essays should include a bibliography. This means that at the end of the essay you must supply a list of all primary texts and all secondary critical materials which have been quoted from, referred to, or substantially influential in the preparation of the essay. The list should be presented in alphabetical order by author/editor.

Follow the pattern given in these examples:

BOOK WITH SINGLE AUTHOR/EDITOR:

BOOK WITH MORE THAN ONE AUTHOR/EDITOR:
(N.B. name order for second author is not reversed):

BOOK WITH MULTIPLE VOLUMES:

ARTICLE IN JOURNAL:
(N.B. you must identify the article by its complete pagination):

ARTICLE OR CHAPTER IN AN EDITED COLLECTION:
A good essay is well punctuated: poor or incorrect punctuation will weaken your discussion and will be penalised. Commas, colons, semi-colons, and full stops, when used in the right places, create pauses in your prose. This helps the reader to follow the development of your ideas, and gives shape, emphasis and balance to the style. The following notes cover a few of the most basic requirements of effective punctuation. If you have difficulties with punctuation, you may find it helpful to consult one of the books mentioned below in H. There is also a useful guide available from Study Advice:
http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/studyadvice/Studyresources/Writing/sta-punctuation.aspx

1. The Apostrophe is used:
   a. in casual contractions where one or more letters have been omitted, as in don’t (= do not), I’ve (= I have), it’s (= it is), can’t (= can not), and All’s Well That Ends Well (= All is well). Such contractions are commonplace in speech and informal prose, but they are not usually appropriate in a formal essay.
   b. to show the possessive case of a noun. Thus: Shakespeare’s imagery; A Winter’s Tale; the novel’s narrator; children’s literature.
   c. If a singular noun already ends with an s, treat it in exactly the same way (noun followed by apostrophe + s): Keats’s poetry; the witness’s testimony; the Chorus’s function. Plural nouns ending with an s take the apostrophe after the s: the characters’ dialogue; the critics’ debate.

2. Brackets (or parentheses), like dashes and commas (see below), serve as an interruption to the sentence. They are used to insert an additional piece of information, such as an explanation, definition, or illustration, e.g. “When he finished his book (and a copy of the manuscript can be found in the British Library), he sent it to the publisher.” Note that any comma should come after the closed bracket. As a general rule, use brackets sparingly: too many parenthetical insertions can give the impression that you are unsure about the development of your ideas, or render a sentence unnecessarily convoluted.

3. Comma. Misuse or overuse of commas is the most frequent punctuation error. Commas should denote a pause or change of direction in a sentence. They are typically used:
   a. to mark off a qualifying clause or phrase that explains more about the subject. (e.g.) “Henry James’s The Bostonians, set in the 1880s, examines the question of female emancipation.”
   b. to separate items in a list. (e.g.) “The protagonist smugly considers himself to be a man of rigorous intelligence, courtly charm, playfulness, and a rather dangerous sensuality.”
   c. after “aside” words such as “however”, “therefore”, “moreover”, or “similarly”.

The ‘comma splice’ is a very common mistake that can lead to unduly complicated sentences; It happens when a comma is used in a place where stronger punctuation is needed.
   a. Using a comma where a semi-colon is needed.
      The semi-colon separates equal and balanced sentence elements, usually main clauses.
      NOT: The essay got a good mark, the student was pleased.
We need a semi-colon here:
The essay got a good mark; the student was pleased.

b. Using a comma where a colon is needed.
The colon is mainly a mark of introduction. It tells us that the words after it will explain or amplify what has gone before.
**NOT:** The comments on the essay said the following, this is OK, but there are too many punctuation mistakes.
Instead, we write:
The comments on the essay said the following: this is OK, but there are too many punctuation mistakes.

4. **Dash.** The dash can be — and often is — used in the place of a comma, a colon, a semicolon, brackets, and even a full stop. Take care, however, to use dashes only when you are sure that no other punctuation will do. Overuse will tend to suggest that you simply don’t know how to punctuate your sentence.

a. An acceptable example of a pair of parenthetical dashes is: “Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* — according to some critics — is the earliest modern novel in English.”

b. A single dash can be used to introduce explanation, amplification, or correction of what has gone before: (e.g.) “This, surely, was worth waiting for — the greatest play ever written by a woman.”

5. **The Semicolon** can be used:

a. when the relation between two clauses or sentences is too close to be marked off by a full stop and not close enough to be separated by a comma. (e.g.) “*Moby Dick* draws heavily on biblical references; both Ahab and Ishmael, for example, carry significant Old Testament names.”

b. to separate a list of connected items: (e.g.) “In Shakespeare’s *Much Ado*, Beatrice has a low opinion of men; she scorns the idea of marriage; she values her independence.”

6. **The Colon** falls somewhere between being a full stop and a semicolon. The effect of punctuating with a colon is to accentuate contrast between statements. Some examples of usage:

a. to introduce a direct quotation. (e.g.) “As Woolf says: ‘Life is not a transparent envelope.’”

b. to mark the antithesis between two statements. (e.g.) “Mostly the narrative mood is light-hearted: in this episode, however, the tone becomes more sombre.”

c. to introduce a list. (e.g.) “There are many things missing from this theory of literature: a social context, an understanding of gender, a sense of history.”
d. as a substitute for “namely” — “As a writer, she valued one thing above all else: solitude.”

7. **Ellipsis** — a row of three spaced dots … Ellipsis should only be used to indicate when you have omitted some material within a quoted passage. Do not use ellipses at either the beginning or the end of a quotation, or to indicate the unarticulated development of thought.

8. **Full stops.** Full stops should mark the natural pause that separates one unit of sense from the next. To avoid overlong, messy sentences, ensure that you deploy full stops whenever a sentence seems in danger of becoming overloaded or careering out of control.
9. Question Marks and Exclamation Marks.
Question marks, to state the obvious, come at the end of questions, and there is no need to put a full stop afterwards. Exclamation marks should be used sparingly, if at all; they are usually felt to be over-emphatic (exclamatory, in fact!), and hence inappropriate to the considered tone of a formal essay.

10. Capitalisation:
Currently, most style guides recommend that the use of capital letters should be restricted to:
- The first word in a sentence.
- Proper nouns (the names of specific people or places) and adjectives made from proper nouns:
- The most important words in the title of a work:
  \textbf{E.g.}: \textit{Much Ado about Nothing}
- People’s titles when preceding the person’s name:
  \textbf{E.g.}: Queen Elizabeth I, BUT: Elizabeth Tudor was a queen.
- Days of the week, months of the year and holidays:
  \textbf{E.g.}: Monday, November, Christmas.
- Historical events, periods or movements:
  \textbf{E.g.}: the Romantic Movement, the War of the Roses.
- The names of organisations and their members:
  \textbf{E.g.}: The Shakespeare Association, the Conservative Party.
- Races, nationalities and languages:
  \textbf{E.g.}: Native American, English, Scots Gaelic.
- Religions and their followers:
  \textbf{E.g.}: Christianity, Christians, Islam, Muslims.

Miscellaneous: Some confusing thing about dates:
Centuries are named from the end, as it were, not the beginning. So, we live in the twenty-first century, but all the dates start with 20--). So the fourteenth century has all the dates beginning with 13--., the seventeenth century has all the dates beginning 16--.

- In essay writing, numbers should be spelled out fully, unless they are specific dates, or line or page references for quotations: so spell out ‘seventeenth century’ (NOT 17th century) BUT refer to 1649 (NOT sixteen forty-nine).
- When used as a noun, centuries are not hyphenated; when used as adjectives, they are hyphenated. \textbf{E.g.}: In the seventeenth century, BUT: seventeenth-century England.

H. Further help with spelling, punctuation and grammar

If you know you have problems with grammar, punctuation and so on, you may find it useful to consult some of the relevant reference books in the University library. These can be dipped into when required, or used more systematically as part of a concerted effort to improve your knowledge and competence. The following list is not meant to be definitive, merely a guide to the best areas of the library for finding this kind of book. You should browse through other books in each area and decide which one suits your needs. Alternatively, consult the corresponding section in a good bookshop and buy a guide for your own private library. For example, Lynne Truss, \textit{Eats, Shoots & Leaves} (London: Profile, 2003) is a light-hearted but helpful guide.
A book geared towards students, such as John Peck and Martin Coyle, *The Student's Guide to Writing: Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling* (2nd edn, 2005), is probably a good investment.

Jane E. Aaron, *The Little Brown Compact Handbook*, (7th edn, 2010) is an American publication (so has American spelling), but also have a wealth of information about researching essay work, writing academic prose and a very helpful and jargon-free section on grammar and punctuation.

Another publication suitable to English undergraduates is Gordon Taylor, *The Student's Writing Guide* (1989). This is specially designed for students in the Arts and Humanities writing academic essays.

You may also wish to consult the Study Advice writing guides, for example the guide to grammar:

http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/studyadvice/Studyresources/Writing/sta-grammar.aspx

Some other useful publications:


*Plain English* (Open University, 1979).


And don’t forget that you can download the MHRA Handbook for free: