Critical Methods of Reading and Writing: Beyond Binaries

Dr. Everett Hamner
Western Illinois University, Fall 2016
ENG 299, Wednesdays 9-11:30, Quad Cities Complex 2216, westernonline.wiu.edu
e-hamner@wiu.edu, 309-762-3999 x62247, off hrs M 9:30-11:30, W 1-2, Th 10:30-11:30 in QCC 2209

General Catalog Description & Prerequisites

Introduction to basic forms and conventions of critical writing, strategies of interpretation, and theoretical issues in literary studies. Prerequisites: ENG 180 (with a grade of C or better) and at least one of the following (with a grade of C or better): ENG 200, 201, 202, 206, 228, 238, 258, 290.

Specific Description & Goals

This course is a core requirement for the English major and minor, as well as a great opportunity for other students to develop skills needed in many careers. It gives students a broad awareness of key vocabulary and methodologies for the study of literature and literary culture, while also applying these skills to the close reading of two relatively recent American novels, including dramatic and cinematic adaptations. It also sets aside time to continue polishing writing skills.

The first half of the course focuses on Mary Klages’s Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed, a uniquely conversational and accessible package of foundational knowledge concerning insightful reading and writing about literature. At the same time, we will work through Diana Hacker’s Pocket Style Manual, a concise treatment of the most important stylistic and mechanical weaknesses in many people’s writing. The highlight of the course’s first half is Ken Kesey’s One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest, an often-banned 1962 novel set in a mental institution—an equally hilarious and serious indictment of American hypocrisies around race, class, gender, and capitalism—as well as a wide range of critical responses.

In the course’s second half, we will continue with exercises in the Pocket Style Manual while turning to Middlesex, Jeffrey Eugenides’s 2002 Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel. A cross-generational tale of a teenager who struggles powerfully with her sexuality and gender identity, the novel echoes some elements of Kesey’s tragicomic tone. One of a handful of American fictions to deal with the ambiguous realities of intersexuality, it also engages warfare, immigration issues, Midwestern transformations during the rise of suburbia, the civil rights movement, the Nation of Islam, and the possibilities of genetic testing—to name just a few themes. This novel and its critical reception is the course’s climactic case study, taking us beyond binary thinking in a wide range of categories.

Coursework involves a substantial reading load, with careful preparation for class discussions; regular exercises in writing mechanics; an article annotation and presentation assignment; three announced, in-class reading comprehension quizzes; and two take-home, open-book essay tests (a midterm & a final).
### 1st WEEK, AUG 24th: SEEING OUR CRITICAL LENSES

**IN CLASS:**
- Group analysis of a couple paragraphs from our first novel
- Initial discussion of various critical approaches to literature
- Small group introductions (using introductory survey handout)
- Syllabus review and discussion of goals and assignments (including Launchpad access)

### 2nd WEEK, AUG 31st: “ONE FLEW EAST, ONE FLEW WEST …”

**READING:**
- Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, part 1 (pp. 9-128 in Signet ed.)

**IN CLASS:**
- Ken Kesey, the Merry Pranksters, the Grateful Dead interview, and a Magic Trip
- Trying on some new (literary critical) lenses and understanding “humanism”
- Signups for article annotations and presentations
- Instructions for *Pocket Style Manual* exercises via Launchpad (also see pp. 6-7)

### 3rd WEEK, SEPT 7th: “… ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO’S NEST”

**READING:**
- Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, part 2-4 (pp. 129-272 in Signet ed.)
- Diana Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual*, topics 1 & 2

**ONLINE:**
- Launchpad LearningCurve: Active/passive voice (see instructions, pp. 6-7)

**IN CLASS:**
- Grasping the basics of structuralism and deconstruction
- Ken Kesey’s Paris Review interview

### 4th WEEK, SEPT 14th: SANITY, PURPOSE, & PSYCHOANALYSIS

**READING:**
- Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual*, topics 3 & 4
- Fred Madden, “Sanity and Responsibility: Big Chief as Narrator & Executioner” *(Modern Fiction Studies 32.2, Sum 1986)*
  - Annotation/presentation _____________________________

**ONLINE:**
- Launchpad LearningCurve: Parallelism

**IN CLASS:**
- Quiz #1 (all materials in and out of class, weeks 1-4)
- How authorial intention matters and doesn’t; the blessings & curses of psychoanalysis
### 5th WEEK, SEPT 21: FEMINISM & QUEER THEORY

**READING:**
  
  Annotation/presentation __________________________

  
  Annotation/presentation __________________________

**ONLINE:**
- Launchpad LearningCurve: Shifts

**IN CLASS:**
- Horst and Beidler vs. alternative views from the 80s & 90s (Géfin and Ware)

### 6th WEEK, SEPT 28: IDEOLOGY, RACE, & JACK NICHOLSON ENTERS, STAGE LEFT

**READING:**
- Dale Wasserman, excerpt from his play, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1970)

**VIEWING:**
- *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1975 film)

**ONLINE:**
- Launchpad LearningCurve: Word choice and appropriate language

**IN CLASS:**
- Seeing cultural systems, from Marx to Bhaba

### 7th WEEK, OCT 5: ADAPTATION & GENRE IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

**READING:**
- Thomas Slater, “*One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*: A Tale of 2 Decades” *(Film & Lit*, 1988)
  
  Annotation/presentation __________________________

- John Zubizarreta, “The Disparity of Point of View in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*” *(Literature/Film Quarterly* 22.1, 1994)
  
  Annotation/presentation __________________________

**ONLINE:**
- Launchpad LearningCurve: Subject-verb agreement

**IN CLASS:**
- Novel vs. play vs. screenplay vs. film: content evolves across form

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*Image: Jack Nicholson in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*.*
8th WEEK, OCT 12th: THEORIES OF RELIGION, MASCULINITY, & DISABILITY

READING:
~Hacker, A Pocket Style Manual, topic 12
~Janet Larson, “Stories Sacred and Profane: Narrative in One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest” (Religion and Literature 16.2, Sum 1984)
~Caroline Leach, “Disability and Gender in Ken Kesey’s One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest” (Disability Studies Quarterly 28.4, Fall 2008)

ONLINE:
~Launchpad LearningCurve: Pronoun agreement and pronoun reference

IN CLASS:
~Quiz #2 (all materials in and out of class since week 4 quiz)

9th WEEK, OCT 19th: MIDTERM

IN CLASS:
~Review of the course so far and begin reading Middlesex together
~Open-book, short-essay test (midterm)

10th WEEK, OCT 26th: IMMIGRATION & IDENTITY

READING:
~Jeffrey Eugenides, Middlesex, Book One
~Hacker, A Pocket Style Manual, topic 14 & 15

ONLINE:
~Launchpad LearningCurve: Run-on sentences

IN CLASS:
~An introduction to Jeffrey Eugenides, including a New York Times video interview

11th WEEK, NOV 2nd: TECHNOLOGY & BIOLOGY

READING:
~Jeffrey Eugenides, Middlesex, Book Two
~Hacker, A Pocket Style Manual, topics 17 & 18

ONLINE:
~Launchpad LearningCurve: Commas AND Semicolons and colons

IN CLASS:
~What might it mean to study science and literature together?

12th WEEK, NOV 9th: PUBERTY & MYTHOLOGY

READING:
~Jeffrey Eugenides, Middlesex, Book Three
~Hacker, A Pocket Style Manual, topics 19 & 20

ONLINE:
~Launchpad LearningCurve: Apostrophes

IN CLASS:
~Quiz #3 (all materials in and out of class since week 8 quiz)
~Queer questions and questionable queries
### 13th WEEK, NOV 16th: DETERMINISM & FREEDOM

**READING:**
- ~Jeffrey Eugenides, *Middlesex*, Book Four

**ONLINE:**
- ~Launchpad Exercises 29-1 & 30-1: Thesis statements AND Avoiding plagiarism

**IN CLASS:**
- ~The many shapes of narrative

NO CLASS NOV 23rd (THANKSGIVING BREAK)

### 14th WEEK, NOV 30th: GENERATIONS, GENDERS, GENETICS

**READING:**
- ~Interview with Jeffrey Eugenides, by Jonathan Safran Foer (*BOMB* 81, Fall 2002)

**ONLINE:**
- ~Launchpad Exercises 31-1 & 33-1: Integrating sources AND In-text citations

**IN CLASS:**
- ~Course evaluations

### 15th WEEK, DEC 7th: HYBRID BODIES, HYBRID STORIES

**READING:**
- ~Debra Shostak, “‘Theory Uncompromised by Practicality’: Hybridity in Jeffrey Eugenides’ *Middlesex*” (*Contemporary Literature* 49.3, Fall 2008)
- ~Stephanie Hsu, “Ethnicity and the Biopolitics of Intersex in Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex*” (*MELUS* 36.3, Fall 2011)

**IN CLASS:**
- ~Quiz #4 (all materials in and out of class since week 12 quiz)

### FINALS WEEK, DEC 14th: FINAL EXAM & FUTURE APPLICATIONS

**IN CLASS:**
- ~Open-book essay test (final) due online before class
Course Texts

**Grading Criteria**

~An A recognizes broad and deep understanding of the course material, regular and insightful discussion contributions, and very strong written work—a major impact on the course’s success.

~A B indicates good commitment to coursework, demonstrable contributions and achievements in both verbal and written analysis, and tangible positive impact on other students’ learning.

~A C reflects adequate completion of coursework, including satisfactory participation and writing.

~A D or F denotes incomplete or unsatisfactory coursework, unsatisfactory participation, and/or detraction from course goals (via plagiarism or otherwise).

I will figure final grades using the university scale (A, B, C, D, or F, with pluses/minuses) and the values below (with minor adjustments as needed). Please note the “My Grades” function on the course website, which lets you track assignment grades and estimate your current overall grade at any point.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Pocket Style Manual exercises (based on completion of LearningCurve exercises)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2 article annotations and presentations (by online signup, 5% each)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>4 quizzes (10% each)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>Open-book short essay tests (midterm and final, 20% each)</td>
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**Brief Looks at Assignments**

*Pocket Style Manual exercises:* Starting with week 3, you will regularly read and complete online exercises from Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers’s *A Pocket Style Manual*. I am well aware that most of you have had multiple composition courses, but the sections and exercises I have selected represent areas where I see common ongoing struggles among your peers. On one hand, grammar, style, and mechanics may seem superficial ways for people to evaluate each other’s intellects or abilities. On the other, this is reality: people do form opinions very quickly on this basis. In an application letter for a competitive job, for instance, writing weaknesses will make you less likely to get the chance to demonstrate the whole picture of what you can offer. Furthermore, language structures thought as much as the inverse, so if you can continue doing the hard work of nailing down these general rules, you are likely to become a sharper thinker in the process. And if creativity is your thing? You have to master the rules before you can break them meaningfully. See Shakespeare, William.

One appeal of the *Pocket Style Manual* and its online supplements is that you can spend more time where you need it personally and less where you don’t. The LearningCurve exercises you will...
complete are adaptive: you will start with easier questions, and as you demonstrate knowledge, they will become more challenging. The better you do, the faster you reach the total points required for each competency area. FYI, there are also other exercises available for you to practice that are tied to each area of clarity, grammar, mechanics, etc. There will be a tour of the site in class, but you’re welcome to go to it at any time, and you are certainly welcome to complete the exercises early if you so choose.

~To register for Pocket Style Manual work go to: http://www.macmillanhighered.com/launchpadsolo/pocket7e/3787516

~To have three options to enroll in the course: you can purchase direct access, you can buy an access code, or you can get free 21 day access while deciding. Bundling with the book may be advantageous.

~To navigate and start using LaunchPad please consult the Get Started guide and/or view this video. If you have problems registering, purchasing, or logging in, please contact Customer Support. You can reach a representative 24 hours a day, 7 days a week through the online form, by chat, or by phone at (800) 936-6899 (M-Th 8 a.m.-3 a.m., F 8 a.m.-noon, Sat noon-8, Sun noon-3 a.m.).

**Article annotation and presentation:** Throughout the semester, we will be reading articles by literary critics who represent different approaches to our primary texts (Cuckoo’s Nest and Middlesex). During the first couple weeks of class, you will sign up to annotate and cultivate discussion for TWO particular articles (first come, first serve online). Your job here is to write a 500-word annotation (due on the course website under “Discussions” the night before the class) that (a) spends roughly half its space very specifically summarizing the argument (in your own words, using quotations sparingly); (b) uses the next quarter to respond to and evaluate the article (Where is it illuminating or unclear? What should we take away about the primary text it engages and the critical approach(es) it represents?); and (c) devotes the final quarter to developing several questions inspired by the piece for class discussion.

Once in class, your task is to use your annotation to describe the article’s claim and your response, then cultivate group discussion of the questions you have prepared. In some cases, this will take place alongside another student also working on the same article, so it will help to consult in advance so your material is not too repetitive. In determining grades, I will focus mainly on the written component, but also keep in mind how the group discussion goes. Mechanics matter, but the accuracy and specificity of your representation of the article and the provocativeness and insight of your response and questions will be the biggest factors. Signups for the articles will begin in week 2.

**Quizzes:** These will neither be picky, insignificant-detail interrogations, nor such easy affairs that one could prepare sufficiently by reading summaries. The idea is that most people who recently covered all assigned texts with good comprehension will average 70-80% of the points available (i.e., earn a “B” or better). Please keep in mind that each quiz only covers material since the previous one. Students sometimes worry about the quizzes initially, but soon agree they provide valuable accountability during the course and allow for higher-quality, greater-depth discussions. My best advice is to get the reading done well in advance, then go back over it, your reading and in-class notes, and my “discussion notes” or other handouts. Checking your understanding and comparing reactions in outside-class conversations with classmates can also be very helpful.

**Open-book short essay tests (midterm and final):** My classes generally focus on applying material in writing projects, but this course’s writing quantities are moderate. Because this is the only required foundational course in the English major and minor and there is so much material worth covering, and also because I want to help you with your other writing-intensive courses, I do not assign traditional papers. Instead, I challenge you to synthesize your learning at the course’s midpoint and conclusion through take-home short essay tests in which you may use all course materials and notes, as long as you cite them appropriately (as with any outside materials you might consult). The priority here is not memorization, but demonstrating your understanding of distinctions between various kinds of literary criticism, your grasp of how the examples we engaged represent larger trends, your mastery of key grammatical and mechanical issues. Most crucially, I want you to begin applying your learning through unique, persuasive interpretations of our primary texts that engage other critics accurately, substantively, and provocatively. Each exam will be provided one week in advance of its due date.
The following is part of all of my syllabi. Please read it carefully, but keep its generality in mind.

**My Teaching Philosophy and Expectations of Students**

The better we understand each other’s expectations, the more quickly we can develop a good working relationship. Here are a few key elements of my teaching philosophy:

~I want students to engage me and each other authentically and maturely. I hope this course will spark your curiosity in many ways, and that happens best when students honestly and tactfully share reactions to controversial topics. I intentionally raise such issues because a public university classroom is a uniquely valuable setting in which to explore and learn from frank, respectful disagreement. I aim for us to develop a classroom community that everyone appreciates and that extends beyond its walls.

~Just as critically, I expect students to be professionally responsible. You should approach this course as you might a challenging, rewarding job, one with tasks that are yours alone. I well understand that it is very hard to balance multiple classes, paid work, childrearing, and other responsibilities, but my roles include challenging you beyond your comfort zone and honestly assessing your academic work (not your value as a human being). Having a good sense of how your work stacks up, both in terms of strengths and weaknesses, is critical for your future decisions. Do your best to remember: a grade is a snapshot of a brief moment (and even a semester is brief); it takes a lot of these together to begin to illustrate your abilities, and even your entire college GPA will never convey those fully.

~While we will be studying fields in which I am relatively expert, I approach this class as a learner, too. Wisdom is not just knowledge, but humility, a deepening awareness of how much one does not know. I spent over a decade earning my graduate degrees not to hoard power, but to be in a position to empower others. You show you are ready for that with your simultaneous investment. In short, what you get out of this course will be directly related to what you put into it, during and beyond classtime.

**Attendance & Participation**

My courses differ substantially from those requiring regurgitation of memorized information. Our goals include learning new interpretive approaches, understanding diverse people and ideas, expanding critical thinking and creativity, strengthening analytical and writing skills, and learning from each other’s unique backgrounds. Thus preparation for each session, regular on-time attendance, and thoughtful discussion participation are crucial. Except in extreme circumstances, each class missed beyond 3 (with tardiness or early departure counting as ½ class) will automatically lower the final mark by 1/3 grade (e.g. missing 4 classes changes a B to a B-). Extensive absences will result in an “F” for the course.

**Classroom Courtesies**

Please excuse yourself when necessary; transitions are the best times. Please mute cell phones and other potential distractions; obviously, laptops and other electronics should not be used during quizzes. Finally, please wait to put away materials until we call it a day; I will respect your schedules as well.

**Communication**

While there are occasional errors, I do my best to build a trustworthy syllabus that won’t need major adjustments. Please read it thoroughly; it answers most routine questions. Also, keep in mind that unless you expect to be gone for multiple class meetings in a row, I don’t need to know about illnesses, transportation problems, work conflicts, or the other ordinary challenges. When you have a question not addressed on the syllabus or in class, please ask after class or in office hours. If that isn’t possible, email is the next best option (much faster than voicemail). My goal is to respond within 2 business days, but if my answer is detailed, I may ask to shift the chat to office hours. Finally, be aware that I sometimes use email to make class announcements, so ensure I have an address you check daily.
Frequently Asked Questions

1. Q. Can I make up the quiz I missed?
   A. Yes—but only within the next week (whether in office hours, during the next class meeting’s break, or immediately afterward). Also, I only offer this opportunity once per semester, barring extreme circumstances (which do not include having to work, car breakdowns, deaths in friends’ families, etc.).

2. Q. Can you tell me what I missed in class?
   A. Not really; the experience of most of our conversations and even my presentations will be difficult to replicate in other forms. However, I can say that almost every week, I hand out some form of “discussion notes,” and I usually get these posted on the course website (under “Content”) within 24 hours.

3. Q. What should I write about?
   A. What do you care about? What has grabbed you and evoked some sort of emotional response, whether positive, negative, or in some combination? I regularly encourage students to engage texts and questions that have significant personal resonance; most people do their best work when it means more than a grade. If you’re having a hard time getting at what you care about, seek out conversation—not just with me and peers, but also with family, friends, and others who know you well. Sometimes having to introduce your learning to those unfamiliar with the material helps the most in figuring out what excites you.

4. Q. How does your grading scale work?
   A. My system may mean your grade is higher than you think. Western Online will compute your current course grade using my formula, but it’s simple enough to do yourself. The maximum possible points for the course is 100, so divide your total by that (or by the points available as of a given date), then multiply that number by 4. This puts your score on the 4.0 scale, which I then translate to a letter grade. The same process can be used for any individual assignment. So, for example, if you earned 8 out of 10 points on a quiz, you would divide 8 by 10 (=.80), then multiply that by 4 (=3.20), and that would be between a B and a B+. In each case, I reserve the right to bump the grade up a notch if I believe it’s warranted (or rarely down, most often when there are attendance problems like those described earlier in the syllabus).

5. Q. Do you want a hard copy of my paper, and when will it be graded?
   A. Please submit papers via the course website only; if it should be down when a deadline is approaching, emailing the paper and then posting it the next day is fine. My goal is to return papers online within a week of the due date. Late papers can take longer; please alert me of such submissions with an email.

Further Writing Assignment Guidelines

In addition to utilizing the argumentative essay revision guide at the end of this syllabus, it is worth familiarizing yourself with a good style guide. I use MLA style most often, but other styles (Chicago, APA, or another with pre-approval) are fine as long as they are consistently applied. Please use this page setup on all assignments, unless specified otherwise: 1” justified margins on all sides; size 12, Times New Roman font; and double-spacing. Finally, provide a cover page including paper title, course title and my name, your name, and date, as well as a list of works cited or a bibliography. Unless instructed otherwise, all assignments should be submitted online as a docx, doc, or rtf file.

The Writing Center

“The U.S. Bank WIU-QC University Writing Center is available to assist you with general and specific questions on writing assigned in any discipline and at any academic level. The one-on-one assistance available is valuable for generating ideas, talking about global-level issues such as organization, and even working through grammatical problems. The writing center is located in QC Complex 2219. Call 309-762-9481 for an appointment and be sure to bring a copy of your assignment.”
Late Work

Barring extreme emergencies or prior arrangement, I will deduct one-third of a grade for each week (or portion thereof) that an assignment is late. If you anticipate special difficulty in meeting a deadline, please discuss this with me privately and well in advance so that if warranted, we can consider special arrangements. Readings and assignments are in many ways cumulative, so it is important that you keep up; at the same time, we lead busy lives and occasionally other priorities intervene. Balancing those realities, my policy aims to make being on-time important without making a rare delay devastating.

Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty are among the most serious violations of a student’s integrity and of relationships with the instructor, fellow classmates, and the university. In the humanities, plagiarism most often involves presenting another person’s specific words or ideas as one’s own, whether by copying or closely paraphrasing, and without citing the source. Please be aware that such an offense will at minimum result in an “F” on the assignment and in many cases leads to an “F” for the course. In many of my courses, I briefly review proper citation, but if you have questions about how to credit an idea or information source, ask. If you are unsure about definitions or consequences of academic dishonesty, consult WIU’s Student Academic Integrity Policy at http://www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php.

Counseling Services

“Confidential counseling services are available for WIU-QC students. Time management, stress management, balancing work and family, study skills, low self-esteem, relationship problems, depression, and anxiety are some examples of issues that students may address in personal counseling. Students may call 309/762-1988 to make an appointment with Counseling and Career Services.”

Accommodations

“Students with disabilities: In accordance with University values and disability law, students with disabilities may request academic accommodations where there are aspects of a course that result in barriers to inclusion or accurate assessment of achievement. To file an official request for disability-related accommodations, please contact the Disability Resource Center at 309-298-2512, disability@wiu.edu or in 143 Memorial Hall. Please notify the instructor as soon as possible to ensure that this course is accessible to you in a timely manner.”

Sex Discrimination/Title IX

“University values, Title IX, and other federal and state laws prohibit sex discrimination, including sexual assault/misconduct, dating/domestic violence, and stalking. If you, or someone you know, has been the victim of any of these offenses, we encourage you to report this to the Title IX Coordinator at 309-298-1977 or anonymously online at: http://www.wiu.edu/equal_opportunity_and_access/request_form/index.php. If you disclose an incident to a faculty member, the faculty member must notify the Title IX Coordinator. The complete Title IX policy is available at: http://www.wiu.edu/vpas/policies/titleIX.php.”

Student Rights & Responsibilities

For further information on expectations for both students and university personnel, please see http://www.wiu.edu/provost/students.php.
Dr. Hamner's Argumentative Essay Revision Checklist

The Introduction

1. **Hook**: Will your introduction (including the first sentence) efficiently grab readers' attention without being silly, exaggerated, or disconnected? Is the shift from it to the paper's thesis natural or forced?

2. **Thesis**: Is it clear what sentence(s) convey the paper's central claim?
   
   **Strengthening your thesis:**
   
   - Is your claim obvious or subtle? Boring or daring? Outlandish or plausible?
   - Is your claim vague or specific? General or precise?
   - Is something significant clearly at stake in your argument? Have you provided a sense of why it matters whether your reader buys or dismisses your claim?

3. **Map**: Does the introduction preview the order in which the paper will examine the evidence?

The Body

4. **Main Points**: Can you summarize in a single phrase the main point and/or task of each body paragraph, or are some paragraphs' goals or relevance to the thesis unclear?

5. **Topic Sentences and Concluding Sentences**: Within a given paragraph, do the topic sentence and concluding sentence fit, without being identical? Do they provide meaningful links between paragraphs?

6. **Organization**: Are there any paragraphs that don't make logical sense in the organization of the essay—e.g. too-short/disconnected "lonely" paragraphs or too-long/repetitive "bullying" paragraphs? Should any be removed or integrated elsewhere? Can you reorder so the argument's force grows more naturally?

7. **Textual Evidence/Quotation**: Is there sufficient evidence from specific texts (at least one quotation per body paragraph, as a general rule) to back up the argument's main points? Are there appropriate page number citations? Does the paper introduce quotations with a sense of their original context? After quotations, do you offer interpretations of their meaning or just expect readers to hear them as you do?

8. **Minimal Summary, Maximum Analysis**: Except in briefly introducing unfamiliar key text(s), does the paper avoid plot summaries? Does your interpretive and analytical work remain the focus?

9. **Reasonable Specifics, Not Generalities or Overreaches**: Does your paper resort to vague generalities that might describe any text? ("The author uses lots of description to help readers understand.") Does it include gross overstatements that cost you credence? ("In this story everything is about death.")

The Conclusion

10. **Closure**: Does the conclusion bring the essay to a meaningful close or end abruptly? Does it avoid exact restatement of the introduction, but still reinforce your main points? Does it suggest how the essay's main ideas might be expanded into other contexts and why it matters that your reader take them seriously?

Mechanics & Style

11. **Grammatical & other mechanical issues**: Has at least one strong writer proofread your paper?

    **Among the most common problems (beyond spelling, capitalization, basic punctuation):**
    
    - Pronoun reference: are the referents of your pronouns clear? Do they agree in number?
    - Run-on sentences and fragments: is each of your sentences a single, complete thought?

12. **Stylistic issues**: Have you presented your work in the most professional, attractive manner possible?

    **Among the most common problems, especially for less experienced writers:**
    
    - Verbal "fluff": is every word and phrase doing real work toward demonstrating your thesis? Have you eliminated as much repetition as possible? You want the "impact per word ratio" as high as possible.
    - Have you stayed in the present tense while writing about literature, film, or other artistic texts?
    - Have you provided an accurate, unique, provocative, inviting title?
    - Does your paper fit the length and formatting requirements?