

## Essay, purpose/skills

- English courses develop skills that are useful in a wide range of careers: most importantly 1) writing clearly and concisely—in a world of tl:dr, we need effective communication! but also 2) critical thinking—the ability to find information and assess its accuracy/value, 3) writing persuasively—the ability to affect how people feel and respond, and 4) creative thinking—the ability to produce something new and improved in a world more and more dominated by bland copy-paste algorithmic writing.
- The essay for this course gives you practice in developing all these skills! You will be finding and assessing information about socio-historical contexts, presenting it clearly and concisely, and persuading readers that your creative way to reflect that information in performance will have artistic value.

## Essay, details

- Write an essay focused on one of the five assigned course plays other than “The Rehearsal.” Aim for under 1500 words—quality is more important than quantity. Please ignore the “five-paragraph essay” plan much beloved by high school teachers—split your essay into paragraphs that cover one major topic each, and suit your structure to your argument, not your argument to your structure!
- Find a culturally significant moment in your focus play, and research its socio-historical context. It could be one specific line or action, or a slightly longer but still brief dialogue/incident. When researching, look for peer-reviewed academic sources either from our library (books, articles) or respectable and reliable websites (academic blogs, OwnVoices organizations). Aim for 3-5 sources you can draw on in the essay: if you can only find one or two, you should get help with your research or choose a different moment in the play; if you can find ten or twelve, choose the best ones to use as support in the essay.
- The purpose of the essay is twofold: 1) explain the context of this moment in the play with support from your secondary sources (your research), to deepen your readers’ understanding of the play, and 2) suggest how to incorporate this new understanding of the play through staging, to strengthen the impact it would have on a live audience, using your primary source (the play script) as support.
- Your staging suggestion(s) need to have clear links to your research and to the play’s content/message, but don’t have to be limited to the moment you focused your research on. For example, adding details to a character’s costume or the set design would be visible throughout the play or the scene, but can add to the audience’s understanding of your focus moment. Staging suggestions are not of course limited to costume and set—you could use a prop, a soundscape, lighting effects, blocking, etc.

- Note: if you choose *Fiddler on the Roof* for your essay, you'll also need to watch your focus scene in multiple video versions (the film version and different ones on YouTube) and compare your staging suggestion to what other productions have done as part of your essay. Add the productions you watch to your Works Cited list, along with your research sources and the primary source (the play).
- The final paragraph of the essay should **not** repeat your previous points about cultural context and staging. Instead, address the "so what?" questions: How would your hypothetical live audience benefit from your staging? What will they learn, and why should they learn that?
- The finished paper should respond to feedback you've received on the introductory paragraph (from your TL), the outline (from your peers), and the rough draft (from your TL).
- It must include a Works Cited list (or a Works Cited and Consulted list), giving your primary text, your secondary sources, and, if you focused on *Fiddler on the Roof*, the video versions you watched to see how others staged your focus scene.
- It should also include an Assistance Acknowledged list in a short paragraph, thanking the people/apps that helped you. For example, you might say "I'd like to thank the library staff person at AskAway who helped me find the article by Chung, Manpreet in my tutorial for suggesting the lighting cue, and my mother for proofreading the paper. I also acknowledge that I used ChatGPT to generate possible titles for this paper, and I adapted its suggestion of 'blah blah blah' to my current title of 'blah blah.'"

Stage 1a, introductory paragraph (handed in for feedback)

- This is an early draft of the first paragraph of your essay, due Jan 26: it needs to map out what your paper will do. However, because it's an early draft, you're not locked into this for the final essay—in fact, you'll **want** to revise it in response to a) feedback from your TL, b) feedback you get from your peers on your outline, and c) your own writing process!
- It needs to be clear and concise: don't repeat yourself, add unnecessary words, or try to make yourself sound fancy.
- The essay for this course is **not** an argumentative essay, so it **won't** have a thesis statement! It's more an expository essay, i.e. one that provides an explanation to your readers: in this case, you're explaining the context for something in the play and then explaining how you personally would make that context clear to a theatre audience.

Rubric for feedback

elements/criteria for feedback	comments
--------------------------------	----------

content: the paragraph introduces your readers to the play (author, title, year), the focus moment/scene, the most important point from your research so far, and a brief summary of your staging in response to your research	
style: the paragraph is clear and concise, easy to understand and follow	
workability: the research context and suggested staging make sense together, and the staging sounds like it would be effective in performance	
suggestions for modification/improvement	

[Stage 1b was an in-tutorial peer-review of outlines]

Stage 2, rough draft (handed in for feedback)

- A full draft of your essay is due Feb 9. It should include your Works Cited and Assistance Acknowledged.
- If your TL's feedback on this version of the paper indicates that you need significant improvement/revision in one or more specific aspects, please talk with them about it.

Rubric for feedback

elements/criteria for feedback	comments
essay provides sufficient and reliable information about cultural context	
essay provides staging suggestions that are workable and will deepen a live audience's understanding of the play	
essay is clear and concise, easy to follow, using reasonably correct grammar	

essay uses MLA formatting for quotations, paraphrases, and Works Cited	
other	

Stage 3, final draft (handed in for a mark)

- The revised draft of your essay is due Mar 1. Check the description of the essay details above to make sure you're including everything you need to.
- Your tutorial leader will read this version over and use the same assessment criteria as for the rough draft to determine an overall percentage grade for the finished assignment. Any late penalties for the introductory paragraph, rough draft, and finished paper will all be deducted from the mark at this time. For how percentage marks correspond with letter grades in English courses, see [this page](#).
- Your TL may not provide any written feedback or only a very small amount along with the percentage mark. However, you are welcome to talk with your TL in person about the mark for the finished paper, should you want advice on improving your writing in future courses, just as you are welcome to talk with them at earlier points in the process!