

GUIDELINES FOR ESSAYS

by Professor Lawrence Raab, Williams College Department of English

All papers must be typed, double-spaced, and carefully proofread.

Use 1" or 1 1/4" margins.

Type only on one side of the page.

Include a title page with your name, date, and title of the paper. Leave the rest blank for comments.

Staple in the upper left hand corner.

Make sure you correct grammatical errors indicated on earlier papers. Papers that repeat errors that were pointed out earlier will be graded down half a grade, and may be returned to be rewritten.

Use a good dictionary, but remember that not all of the definitions of a given word will necessarily be appropriate. You must always return to the context in which the word appears.

Keep your verb tenses consistent. Use the present tense when summarizing the action of a work of literature (even when the work is not written in the present tense).

Write in complete sentences. Avoid slang and colloquialisms.

Write your opening paragraph last, after you've discovered the ideas of your essay. Use the opening paragraph to get things started in an interesting way—with a provocative sentence, perhaps, or a challenging question. Do not feel that you need to summarize your entire argument at the very beginning.

Avoid vagueness and generality. Challenge and refine your own language as you revise. This will lead to more and better ideas.