Mary Brant’s Guide to Writing: English And Comparative Literary Studies

• **Give yourself enough time.** When you receive the prompt, begin thinking about it immediately. Have a draft of your paper completed two days before it is due. Give it one day to rest, and then edit/revise.

• **Talk to your professor.** Your professor knows your prompt best. Even if you don’t think you have any questions, talk to your professor individually during office hours about your ideas, and get his or her feedback.

• **Write what you mean.** Instead of using flowery language and unnecessary words, keep your writing succinct and clear.

• **Avoid passive voice.** Avoid “to be” + the past participle.

• **Have a specific thesis.** General statements make for weak arguments.

• **Use topic sentences.** Topic sentences introduce your reader to the ideas you will present in your paragraph and keeps your paper focused on your thesis.

• **Take a chance, but support it well.** Professors enjoy reading papers with original, unique ideas. However, make sure to support your idea(s) with appropriate evidence.

• **Analyze your quotes.** Your paper should express your ideas. Use textual evidence and quotes, but make sure to analyze them. In other words, if you use a quote, explain its significance and how it is relevant to your argument. Do not just leave a quote “hanging” at the end of a paragraph.

• **Don’t end paragraphs with ideas that belong with the next paragraph.**

• **Some Miscellaneous Technical Tidbits:** Only use ellipses in a quote when you have deliberately left something out. Do NOT use them at the beginning or end of a quote. Put
short stories and poem titles in quotation marks. Don't start sentences with "This", "There is" or "It is".

- **MLA.** English and Comparative Literary Studies papers should be written according to MLA guidelines unless otherwise stated by the professor. This is 12 pt. font, Times New Roman with 1" margins. Cite your sources according to MLA guidelines (See Hacker guide to writing for reference or check online at [http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/](http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/)).

- **Have someone else read your drafts.** Come to the CAE or have a roommate or friend read your paper. Take into account their suggestions and revise again before turning it in.

- **Have fun!** Writing papers can be tedious, but if you are enthusiastic and positive, you will enjoy the writing process.