4.0 Area C: Humanities and fine and performing arts

4.1 Theatre Arts

When students think of a theatre arts classroom, writing is probably not the first thing that they think of. However, theatre arts classes at Gordon State—especially Introduction to Theatre—involves a surprisingly significant amount of writing.

4.1.1 Introduction to Theatre and process-based writing

Although students' theatre arts professors may not necessarily collect their first drafts or wish to see their students' pre-writing activities (though professors might want to see these things), it is still a good idea to think about the steps involved in writing:

   Reading ► Pre-Writing ► Drafting ► Revision ► Editing ► Submission

4.1.2 The types of writing assignments in Introduction to Theatre

Students in Introduction to Theatre classes should expect to write a variety of types of essays including a love song response, performance analysis, dramatic analysis, and playwriting project. Although these are somewhat different assignments, they share some basic goals. Students writing in Theatre Arts classes should expect relatively short assignments (generally three pages or fewer), but they should still attempt to get deeper and focus on the **why** and the **how**, not just the **what**.

4.1.2.1 The what, the why and the how of theatre writing

To a large extent, the what is the easy part. Statements such as: *The play is Hamlet.* *The play is two hours long.* *The play is enjoyable even for those without a familiarity with Shakespeare.* All of these simple statements are fine, but they won't help the student successfully complete the writing assignment.

To complete the assignment successfully, students need to consider the **why**. Why is the play *Hamlet*? Why is it two hours long? Why is it enjoyable? When the student answers those **why** questions, the essay at once becomes more memorable. Consider the following:

> “Shakespeare’s Hamlet is an irresistible temptation for any company. In fact, it’s been said that there’s a production of Hamlet running somewhere on the planet twenty-four hours a day, three-hundred sixty-five days a year every year. In short, sooner or later Gordon State College would have to do Hamlet.”

> “The play clocks in at well over two hours; however, the fidgety shouldn't worry—crisp timing, unexpectedly silly comic scenes interspersed at regular intervals, and the
occasional sword fight make Hamlet fly by. In fact, I was shocked when the house lights went up for intermission.”

“In closing, if you love Shakespeare, go see Hamlet; if you hate Shakespeare, see Hamlet anyway. The quick pace, comic buffoonery and Hollywood-style action will more than make up for the old-fashioned way they have of speaking.”

All of these three passages come to life because they were written with the why as well as the what in mind.

4.1.2.2 Love song analysis

In this writing assignment, students will focus only on the acting. Students pick one actor and focus on two or three key actor's moments in the play. Students should pick physical or vocal choices that the actor made and examine the way that those choices affect performance.

4.1.2.3 Performance analysis

In this writing assignment, the student acts as theatrical critic, sees some live theatre, and then composes a detailed review of the performance. Students should go beyond the mere judgmental, i.e., “I liked it,” or “I did not like it.” Students writing Intro to Theatre Performance Analysis assignments should delve deeper and talk about the why behind their opinions. Additionally, students should focus on all areas of theatrical performance; their papers should at least touch on the acting, the directing, and the design. Papers overly concerned with mere plot summary are rarely successful.

4.1.2.4 Dramatic analysis

This writing assignment can be explained as simply a performance analysis for a play that the student has not seen as yet. In a dramatic analysis, the student examines and picks out key moments of a play in its script form and then explains them in writing.

4.1.2.5 Playwriting project

Working alone, or with another student, this assignment asks the student to write a three minute to five minute play for the stage.

4.1.3 Writing skills developed in writing for Theatre Arts classes

Some of the writing skills developed in the Theatre Arts classes include critical thinking, support from the text, developing an ear for dialogue, creativity and audience awareness.

4.1.4 Pitfalls to avoid in writing for Theater Arts classes
Writing for the theater has its own set of pitfalls to be avoided. One of the most common pitfalls is to confuse plot summary with analysis. Many theatre arts professors will caution students to stay away from mere plot summary. Rarely will professors want copious amounts of plot summary. Most theatre arts professors want students to focus on analysis. Simply put, plot summary is what happens; analysis is why it happens.

4.2 The humanities

*Humanities* is a broad term; *Webster’s* defines it as “the branches of learning (as philosophy, arts, or languages) that investigate human constructs and concerns as opposed to natural processes (as in physics or chemistry) and social relations (as in anthropology or economics)” (“Humanities”). Basically, if it has to do with “being human,” a student might study about it in a Humanities class.

4.2.1 The humanities and writing

At Gordon State College, Humanities classes HUM 1501 and HUM 1502 are open to students who are taking Learning Support English classes. For that reason, writing demands in HUM 1501 and 1502 tend to be modest. Rarely will a Humanities professor assign long and complicated research papers or sophisticated argument assignments. Instead many GSC Humanities professors encourage their students to sally forth into the community and experience some of the art that is around them. A common assignment is the Cultural Event Report.

4.2.2 The cultural event report

Individual professors vary, of course, but this assignment often asks students to visit three or four outside events—concerts, plays, theatrical performances, etc.—and write a review of the events.

4.2.3 Humanities classes and process-based writing

Although humanities professors may not necessarily collect their students’ first drafts or wish to see their students pre-writing activities (though professors might want to see these things), it is still a good idea to think about the steps involved in writing and think of Introduction to Humanities writing assignments in terms of the steps that this book has discussed previously

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For Learning Support students taking Humanities classes, it is particularly important to think of writing as a process and, if it at all possible, to enlist the help of tutors from Gordon State College’s Student Success Center before submitting their cultural event report for evaluation.

4.2.4 Writing skills developed by humanities classes
Some of the elements that separate a strong Cultural Event Report from weak one include depth, detail, and specificity. While many of us are quite comfortable giving our opinion, ("I liked it!" “I hated it!”), we can get tongue-tied when asked to go deeper and explain what about it in particular did we “like” or “hate.” Consider the two following passages:

“The play was kind of boring. I think that my Dad might have even dozed off during the second act.”

“The lack of action, the obscure references to nineteenth-century Italian politics, the poor pacing (I am not sure the actors know their lines), and uncomfortable metal chairs make One Italy! a trying and tedious night at the theater.”

Both passages essentially state the same thing—that the play is boring. But the second passage provides reasons for the conclusion. What makes the writer say that the play was boring? He or she has four reasons: no action, obscure references, poor pacing and uncomfortable chairs.

4.2.5 Pitfalls to be avoided in writing for Humanities classes

Some of the pitfalls in humanities writing include, lack of specificity, getting a late start and failure to take adequate notes.

“Start early” is advice students often hear and often ignore. But in case of the Humanities class cultural event report, ignoring that advice could have dire consequences. This project involves seeing outside events and all the details that come along with seeing events—purchasing tickets, arranging schedules, transportation, and parking—waiting to begin can put the student hopelessly behind. Students should schedule their events so that they have completed their viewing with two full weeks to write and revise the cultural event report.

Of course, getting an early start is useless if the student writer does not take advantage of it by taking specific notes at the performance. “I don’t have to write it down; I can remember it” —we have all said that at least once and we have usually been proved wrong. Students should be sure to attend their cultural events with a small notebook and something to write with. Even though taking notes in a semi-darkened theater can be challenging, students should avoid the temptation to illuminate their notes through use of their cell phones: such behavior is considered very rude.

Since depth and detail is something to be praised in effective humanities writing in, it is not surprising that a lack of specificity can ruin a cultural event report. The student should avoid making a pronouncement without explaining why he or she has come to that conclusion. If, for example, the student writer wants to state that the play’s costuming seemed neglected, then he or she should provide a reason for that
contention; for example: “the play’s costuming was spotty at best: to the best of my knowledge no one in fifteenth-century Verona wore Air Jordans.”

4.3 Music

Although there is probably little formal writing expected in an advanced cello class, Music Appreciation students can expect to do significant writing. Although individual instructors have varying expectations, it is safe to say that much Music Appreciation writing takes the form of either performance critiques or composer biographies.

4.3.1 Music and writing

At Gordon State College, Music Appreciation classes are open to students who are taking Learning Support English classes. For that reason, writing demands in Music Appreciation tend to be modest and instructors tend to be forgiving of one or two minor usage mistakes in a paper. Rarely will a music professor assign long, complicated research papers or sophisticated argument assignments. However, most GSC music professors encourage their students to sojourn into the community and experience some of the art that is around them. Common assignments include the performance critique.

4.3.2 Purpose of music writing

Writing about music serves a myriad of purposes: to demonstrate mastery, to aid in evaluation, but perhaps writing about music serves no more important function than to make improve our listening skills. Indeed, it seems clear that by listening closely, processing, and then writing about the experience we become better audience members and are able to experience music on a deeper and more enjoyable level.

4.3.3 Music and process based writing

Although the professor may not mention process-based writing, it is still a good idea to keep the sequence in mind when preparing for a music class writing assignment.

   Reading ► Pre-Writing ► Drafting ► Revision ► Editing ► Submission

4.3.4 Writing skills developed in music appreciation classes

Both the performance critique assignment and the composer biography assignment place great value on the following attributes: critical thinking, specificity, and appropriate use of discipline-specific terminology.

4.4 English 2111, 2112, 2121, 2122, 2131, 2133

These classes, representing World Literature 1 and 2, English Literature 1 and 2 and American Literature 1 and 2 are all literary-survey classes. Since they share many
common facets, they will be discussed as a group. They are the last English class many students will take, all look at the literature of one area and period. The classes move quickly and provide a broad over-view of the “best and the brightest” literatures these cultures presented. For our purposes, we will refer to them collectively as “English 2***”.

4.4.1 English 2*** and process-based writing

Just like as is English 1101 and English 1102, Gordon State College faculty teaching English 2*** faculty are interested in the finished product, but also in the steps—or process—a student writer has taken to create that piece of work. Regardless of whether or not the English 2*** professor insists on seeing evidence of those steps, he or she still expects the steps to be taken. The same steps that serve the student writer in English 1101 and English 1102—reading, pre-writing, drafting, revision, editing, and submission—will be needed for successful completion of English 2***.

4.4.2 Types of essays and activities in English 2***

Students in English 2*** should expect to write a variety of papers including annotated bibliographies, expository research papers, arguments, persuasive papers, proposals, literary papers, evaluations, and rhetorical analysis papers. It is likely that students will write essays on their examinations as well. Students in English 2*** may or may not be called upon to complete an oral presentation.

4.4.2.1 Annotated bibliography

It can be easy to get an “annotated bibliography” assignment mixed up with a “works cited.” The two do share some attributes—they both contain a list of MLA style resources used in a longer work—but there the similarities end. An annotated bibliography goes further and includes a summary of the work and sometimes an evaluation of the secondary source as well. Annotated bibliographies are often evaluated on the strength of their summaries and evaluations as well as the adherence to MLA form in the citations.

4.4.2.2 Literary analysis essay

Although this assignment is known by many different names, it usually involves tearing a work apart and looking closely at its key moments in hope to determine a “truth” about the literary work in question. This assignment can be done with or without use of secondary sources. One of the keys to successful completion of this assignment is to avoid an over-reliance on plot summary. One way to think about it is like this: plot summary is what happened in a work of literature. Literary analysis is concerned with why it happened. Another way to look at the literary analysis essay is that it seeks to determine how a given piece of literature works.

4.4.2.3 Biographical essay
Like literary analysis, this assignment can go by many different names. This assignment is a research assignment that asks the student to learn about an author’s (or a group of authors’) lives and literary careers and then explain what the student learned to peers and professor. Often biographical essays are particularly successful when they find links between an author’s life events and his or her literary output.

4.4.2.4 Bibliographic essay

One way to think about the bibliographic essay is as an expanded, literary annotated bibliography. The student writer gathers a group of secondary sources all relating to one work or the work of one author. The student summarizes the secondary sources and then creates an essay discussing the central themes or ranges of this criticism. In some ways a bibliographic essay is like the opening sections of a researched literary analysis essay where the student writer discusses prevailing critical opinions on the work in question.

4.4.2.5 Compare and contrast essay

This deceptively simple essay asks the student writer to find both similarities and differences between two different works (or between the collected works of two different authors). Like the literary analysis, this essay can be done with outside sources making it a research essay, or without secondary sources. Many instructors want the student to go beyond mere list making of similarities and differences and contextualize or comment upon those similarities and differences in the essay’s conclusion.

4.4.2.6 Evaluation essay

Evaluation essays usually seek to judge something’s value or worth. Writers can (and do) evaluate anything: works of literature, methods of completing tasks, television shows, and restaurants are some of the categories that lend themselves to evaluation essays. Writers of evaluation essays will set criteria, collect evidence, and render judgment.

4.4.2.7 Essay examinations

Many Gordon State College English professors will ask essay exam questions as part or all of a student’s midterm or final examination. Essay examinations can be challenging, but by following some hints before and during the exam, students can succeed.

4.4.2.7.1 Essay examination strategies-- before the examination

Some students might say that there is absolutely no way to prepare for an essay examination. That is not true. A week or more before the essay examination students should be thinking of possible topics. It is important at this stage to try to “think like a
professor,” and ask not “what do I hope she asks on the exam?” but rather, “what do I think she will ask on the exam?” Students would also be wise to memorize one or two key quotations that they might use in their essay. Obviously, students should gather all necessary supplies well in advance of the examination: the morning of the exam is no time to scurrying around purchasing a blue book.

4.4.2.7.2 Essay examination strategies—during the examination

One of the most useful hints for successful exam writing is also one of the most obvious: read the question carefully. Students should read the question multiple times, even if they are relatively sure that they understand it at first. It is also a good idea to look for “keywords” that hint at how the professor is expecting the question to be answered. For example, “trace” is asking for a history while “describe” is asking for something quite different. “Convince” tells the student writer that an argument or persuasive essay is expected, and “define” should never be confused with “give an example of...

Many writers consider it a good idea to wait and think about what they want to write before starting on an introduction—even in a timed essay situation. Students should develop an argumentative thesis and carefully pick examples from the text that illustrate their thesis. Budget time carefully: decide how much time should be allotted to each section of the essay and force yourself to move one. Students should also avoid cherry picking—the act of picking examples that illustrate one’s thesis while ignoring all the examples that disprove the thesis. Students should also anticipate counter-arguments and head them off. Finally, essay examinations should include a conclusion that does more than merely repeat the thesis.

4.5 Writing skills further developed in English 2***

English 1101 sought to develop skills such as writing with depth and detail, specificity, audience awareness, proper citation and mechanical correctness. Those skills will be further augmented and enriched as the student moves through English 2***. For this reason, among others, it is required that students take English 2*** during after their successful completion of English 1101 with a grade of “C” or better.

4.5.1 New skills developed in English 2***

Participation in English 2*** will develop new skills such as critical thinking, research skills, synthesis, weighing evidence and judicious use of quotation.

4.5.2 English 2*** and critical thinking

To most of the GSC faculty, critical thinking is the process of objective analysis and evaluation of data to form a rational judgment. In this way, “critical thinking” differs from hunches, instinct, and one’s “gut” reaction. If we are to determine what a literary
work “means,” we are going to have to reach that conclusion based on literary evidence, not hunches, guesses, or what we hope it means.

4.5.3 English 2*** and research

One effective way of gathering evidence to determine the meaning of a literary work is to go to the library and see what other readers have thought of the work through the years. Successful Completion of English 2*** allows the student to polish the research skills he or she developed in English 1101 and 1102. Familiar research resources such as Galileo and GIL will be used again. In English 2*** they will be joined by new resources such as J-Stor and Project Muse.

4.5.4 English 2*** and synthesis

Often students in the 2000-level English survey classes will have to synthesize—that is, “put together” a group of disparate and individual critical opinions to get some sort of idea of the “general” state of criticism regarding a particular text.

4.5.5 English 2*** and weighing evidence

One of the things a student in English 2*** will have to do is weigh evidence. Be able to differentiate between causation and correlation; that is, one thing happens and then another thing happens. But does that mean thing number two was caused by thing number one? Sometimes, sometimes not. Weighing evidence also means not ignoring evidence that tends to disprove one’s theory. Instead, meet that counter-evidence head on and account for it. Do not be afraid to bring up such evidence; if you do not do so, others will.

4.5.6 English 2*** and judicious use of quotation

A good English 2*** paper is more than just a group of quotes strung together. Good writers know that they should never quote unless there is something specific about the exact wording that needs to be preserved. Often, summary and paraphrase work just as well (even better) than quotation. Hard and fast rules about how much quotation is too much are hard to find, but many professors agree that rarely should a paper contain more than ten percent quotations.

4.6 Writing pitfalls in English 2***

Some of the danger areas in writing for English 2*** classes include relying on plot summary, cherry picking, stacking the deck and confirmation bias; a belief that any reading is an acceptable reading, and an over-reliance on quotation.

4.6.1 Plot summary
Students have been summarizing works of literature since at least the second grade or so. Perhaps that is the reason that they are so comfortable with summary. The problem is that professors on the college level are rarely looking for mere summary; they often want to go beyond “what” happens to “how” it happened or what it means. Summarizing when one has been asked to analyze will rarely yield a good grade.

4.6.2 Cherry picking, stacking the deck, and confirmation bias

When a student writer takes a theory and applies it to a work of literature, the first person he or she has to convince is his or herself. Sometimes that process is so successful that the writer is unable to see other points of view. That’s when things like cherry picking or stacking the deck become a problem. Basically, these terms all refer to the same thing: an inability or a refusal to acknowledge any evidence that refutes one’s thesis or contention. Experienced writers know not to fear evidence that counters their thesis, they account for it instead. Grappling with confirmation bias reminds us that it is probably better to do good, honorable literary work, to adjust our thesis, or even to abandon our previously-held position than to be “right.”

4.6.3 Multiple readings = any reading?

Reader response criticism tells us that one text can account for multiple readings. Unfortunately, some students take that position and assume that it means a text can account for any reading—anything goes! That’s simply not true. Readings have to be supported by the texts themselves. For example, Hamlet can support many disparate interpretations, but none of them involve space aliens or zombie attacks.

4.6.4 The quote happy student writer

As stated above, quotations should generally account for no more than ten percent of a student paper. Though few professors fail students if they submit a paper that is eleven percent quotations, when the paper is thirty, or forty, or even fifty percent quotations, professors tend to look at the paper as being padded and grade it accordingly. Adding more quotations is rarely the answer to a student writer’s problems.

4.7 Works cited