**A STYLE SHEET FOR WRITING ABOUT LITERATURE**:

**(Basic Elements of Composition, Stylistic Devices and Manuscript Form)**

**I. CONTENT**:

A. Formal essays and research papers must have a title. It should not be the title of the literary work that is the subject of the essay; however, it may include the title of the work in it. Do not underline or put quotation marks around your own title. (i.e. Bronte’s Use of Setting in *Jane Eyre*.)

B. The title of the work and the author’s full name must be given in the introduction. The work may be called “the novel” or “the poem” the second and subsequent times you refer to it. The author is referred to by last name thereafter.

C. Your introduction must focus your topic to a thesis (the argument you will make or your controlling purpose) that alludes to the major sections and implies the organization of your essay.

D. Note that it is rare that the thesis cannot be developed in only one sentence and genuinely requires two or more sentences.

E. Divide your essay into coherent units of thought (paragraphs) that develop an interpretive angle (thesis). Paragraphs should have a topic sentence that relates to one aspect of the thesis.

F. Provide specific support for your interpretation and for your assertions: Integrate direct quotations skillfully to form complete sentences or summarize/paraphrase references to the text.

G. Be sure to include page numbers or act, scene and line numbers in parenthetical citations. QUOTATION MARKS COME BEFORE PARENTHESES. PUNCTUATION GOES OUTSIDE THE PARENTHESES. Jane declares, “I am an independent woman now” (442).

\*Exception for special marks including question marks: “Independent! What do you mean, Jane?” (442).

H. Conclude in a way that does more than restate your main points. Extend thematic meaning, but don’t introduce new material that needs explanation.

**II. STYLE AND MECHANICS**

1. Vary sentence structure, especially sentence openers, to keep the interest of the audience and express your unique voice

B. Use a formal tone; avoid contractions (doesn’t, won’t), slang, clichés, or banalities unless you are quoting material or writing dialogue.

C. Refer to the work of literature accurately as a novel, play, poem or essay, not as “the book.”

D. Titles of novels, epics, plays, magazines, and newspapers go in italics or are underlined if handwritten. Put quotation marks around titles of short stories, poems, articles, and essays.

E. Refer to characters by their full name the first time, but then refer to them by last name only, or in the manner they are called in the text (\*Jane Eyre: Jane; Edward Rochester: Rochester).

F. Write about literature in the present tense. Jane **says**, “.....” not Jane **said**, “.....”

G. Most formal essays will require you to write in third person (he, she, it, the reader, the audience).

1. Avoid using first person pronouns (I, we, me my, us, ours).

2. Never use second person pronouns (you).

H. Avoid using factual verbs when you give an interpretation of the author’s intention.

(*Bronte suggests* is preferred to *Bronte means or Bronte believes...*)

I. You can assume your reader has read the work of literature; therefore, you do not have to include a lengthy summary of the entire work. Do, however, give textual/situational context when using quotations to support your ideas. Avoid excessive summary that is unrelated to your point. **Always focus your discussion upon your central thesis.**

J. AVOID PLAGIARISM: If you quote, you must do so word for word, exactly as it is written. Any text that you change must be enclosed in brackets [ ]. Be sure to include page numbers with each direct quotation. If you paraphrase, you must give the thought in your own words and word order and include the page number on which you found the original material.

K. Use concrete nouns and action verbs. Don’t overuse adjectives and adverbs. Avoid the use of qualifiers such as so, very, rather, pretty, and little.

L. Avoid passive voice (Mrs. Reed hurts Jane, not Jane is hurt by Mrs. Reed).

M. Eliminate clutter and needless words. (“It is...” “There is...” “Because of the fact that...”)

N. Do not overwrite; avoid rich, ornate prose while selecting the best words to express your ideas. CLARITY is more important than verbosity.

O. Write out numbers that are one or two words. (three, thirty-three, one hundred, 365)

P. Use correct spelling. Use a spell check, but do not rely on one. Be consistent in your spelling. Check the spelling of titles, authors and characters.

Q. Use correct punctuation.

R. Write in complete sentences. Proofread for fragments and run-ons.

**III. MANUSCRIPT FORMAT**

* When word processing, double space throughout the paper and use a 12 point font. Times New Roman and Helvetica are standard fonts. Use 1” margins and number pages on top right.
* On all assignments, follow the *modified* MLA format: your name, teacher’s name, the class/period, and the date *single* spaced in the top left margin. Double space to title or essay text.
* When hand-writing, write legibly on one side of paper with MLA format (your name, teacher’s name, class/period, date) on top left and page number on top right.