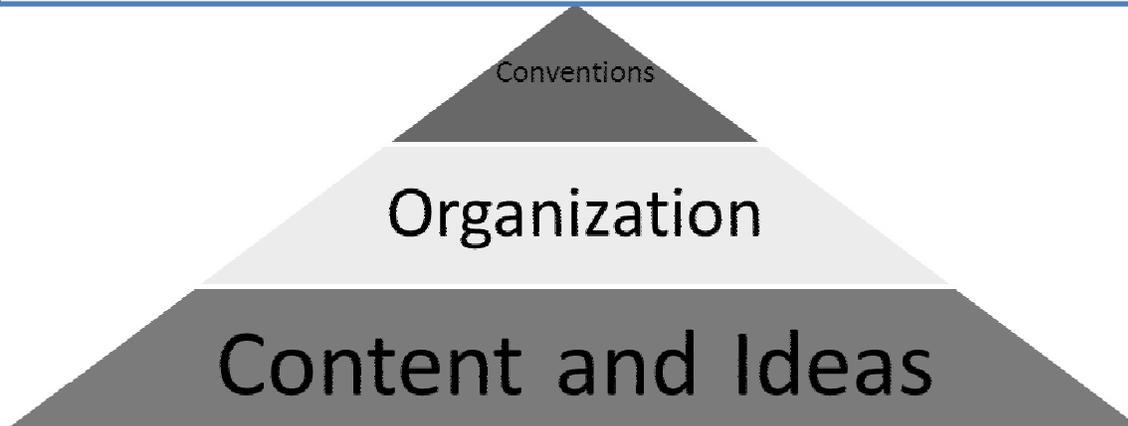


FFJH Communication Rubric

Topic: *To Kill a Mockingbird* Theme Essay



Content and Ideas Clear thesis and lots of support, including quotes from text and elaboration	Mastered Assignment has clear focus. Main idea is developed through details. Content is appropriately covered.	Pretty Good Assignment goes off focus at times. Main point is not always clear. Not enough details. Content is not completely covered.	Needs Work Assignment has no real focus. Little to no detail and the content is not covered.	Grade:
Organization Standard Essay (Intro, Body, Conclusion), topic sentences, transitions	Mastered Details fit where they are placed; assignment is neat, orderly, and fits together with natural transitions.	Pretty Good Assignment is a bit disorganized, with some details out of place, little order and transition.	Needs Work Assignment has no order, few details, assignment is messy and does not fit together.	Grade:
Fluency and Conventions Sentence variety, spelling, capitalization, punctuation: illustrate at least five comma rules; no run-ons or comma splices	Mastered Assignment follows specifications. Fits the style and clarity that were assigned for the task.	Pretty Good Assignment has some errors that could use extra attention and/or a few technical errors.	Needs Work Assignment has too many errors and does not follow specifications. Reworking is recommended.	Grade:

Comments:	Final Grade:
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Suggestions to improve Content and Ideas:

(C1) Address the prompt. Show how the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* illustrates a theme. You shouldn't be writing an essay about yourself or about general truths of life. Use examples from the novel to prove that it illustrates a clearly stated thesis. Get rid of all those little asides, history lessons, solemn conclusions, and morals that have nothing to do with the prompt, and do not just summarize long passages from the story. The characters and events in the book are what you should focus on to support your response to the prompt. You can't get credit if you don't answer the question, so make sure you address the prompt.

(C2) Have a clear thesis. Don't make the reader guess what you are trying to prove; just say it clearly in a single sentence somewhere in the introductory paragraph. For example: *One theme illustrated by To Kill a Mockingbird is "People often distrust what they do not understand."* It is easier to find examples that prove a point when you know what the point is. That's why a thesis statement is important. Also, topic sentences in later paragraphs should make reference to the thesis: "*One way the novel shows that people distrust what they don't understand is....*"

(C3) Offer as much supporting evidence as possible. Don't count words or depend on the five-paragraph format; just keep offering examples, specifics, and quotes until you can't think of anymore. If you can't find enough supporting evidence, you need to change your thesis to something you can support. Remember: Every essay is an argument, a quest for the truth. The more evidence you offer in support of your thesis, the more powerful your argument will be. Do not think of an essay in terms of answering the question as quickly and generally as possible. *Essay* is also a verb that means to put to the test, and that is what you are doing in a written essay: putting your thesis to the test in order to prove your point. More evidence is better; therefore, a long essay that maintains focus on the thesis is better than a short, general one. Since you were only halfway through the novel when you wrote your first draft, you should be able to double the length of your original essay by using more examples from later chapters. It should be evident from your examples that you have read the *entire* book.

(C4) Be specific. Use actual events and quotes from the novel to illustrate every general statement you make. For example: "*Scout learns a lot of life lessons. One of them is to be respectful.*" That's a generalization. To make it specific, you have to tell us HOW she learned to be respectful: refer directly to the novel, summarize what happened, include a purposeful quote (not a long passage, just a powerful sentence that solidifies your point), and elaborate on how this illustrates the overall thesis of the paper.

Suggestions to Improve Organization:

(O1) Follow the Standard Academic Essay Format: Introduction, Body, and Conclusion. This does not mean that you have to write a "five-paragraph essay." Depending on how much supporting evidence you provide, you will probably have more. Regardless of the number of paragraphs, the body of the writing (supporting paragraphs) has to be sandwiched between an intro paragraph and a conclusion paragraph. (Refer to the Standard Academic Essay Format for more details.)

(O2) Capture Attention First! Some teachers just want you to launch right into your thesis. I am not one of those teachers. Intrigue me! Say something provocative. Set the scene. Give me a little background info. Mention the book by name. Questions can be good, but avoid forced, rhetorical questions like "Have you ever read *To Kill a Mockingbird*?" Whatever kind of "hook" you decide to use, make sure it ties to your thesis statement in a meaningful way. (Explain the connection, if necessary.) *Do not summarize the story!* A good order of operations for an introductory paragraph goes like this: Attention getter, background info (if needed), areas of focus, clear thesis statement.

(O3) Use Transitions. Transitions can be single words that get you from one sentence to another (*Also, ..., Next, ..., Finally, ...*) or complete sentences that get you from one paragraph to the next: *Scout is educated not only by her father but also by her neighbor, Miss Maudie.* They can go at the end of one thought or at the beginning of the next, but they need to be in there somewhere. Transitions are the signals that guide your reader through the paper and make your organization clear and your logic easy to follow. Sudden jumps from one idea to another unrelated one are confusing, so use transitions to create relationships between ideas.

Various Suggestions:

(V1) Avoid “solemn vapors” and preaching. A good sermon may sound all high and mighty, but it doesn’t always support a thesis or prove a point. Also, it may confuse us: “As children we are so naïve that if we were to continue such innocence throughout our years, we would surely face a problematic future. We learn vital life lessons that no classroom can teach us. We grow up and learn from our mistakes, which helps us avoid making the same ones later on...” *So? What does this have to do with the novel?* “Most written ideas we encounter throughout our lives are for one general purpose or another. It’s up to the reader or the “perceiver” to add counteracting insight. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, however, is richly filled with contrapositive knowledge that can be found both in and out of its own setting.” *Huh?!?* Finally, avoid preaching directly to the reader: “You have to treat everyone fairly...,” or “It is up to you to make a difference....” Get rid of the words *you* and *your*. Stick to the third-person to prevent “solemn vapors” and preaching.

(V2) Think of every body paragraph in these terms:

- A. Topic sentence: *What point are you making in this paragraph? Don’t just retell the story!*
- B. Generalization: *What proves this point?*
- C. Specific Example: *What in the book led you to believe your generalization? Quotes are good.*
- D. Elaboration: *How does this example you’ve cited support the topic sentence of this paragraph and the thesis of the essay? Explain. Make the connection clear.*
- E. Transition (or Conclusion): *What’s another thing that supports your topic sentence or thesis? (or What were you proving here, again?)*

(V3) Use the first-person (*I, me, my, mine*) sparingly. A personal aside in the introduction or conclusion might be okay, but this is an essay about a theme in a specific novel, not your life story. Don’t do this: “I think that learning doesn’t always have to come from the classroom. I personally have learned many things from my parents, family, and friends. I know several people who only learn what they like in school. I think the opposite is true for Scout.”

(V4) Don’t announce yourself. “I am writing on the second theme of the book,” “For my writing assignment, I chose to write about...,” “The theme I chose was...,” “I am here today in this essay to tell you about this theme and the big role I think it plays in the book.” *Well, duh! If we’re reading what you have written, you don’t need to announce what you’re writing about!* Even worse is this construction, which some students use in place of a good transition: “Now I am going to tell you about...” *Argh! I’m already reading it! You don’t need to announce what you’re about to write. Just write it!* (No Bubbas!)

(V5) *Italicize* or underline book titles. Do not enclose them in quotation marks.