

Master Checklist of Common Mistakes

Check off each item on this list before submitting your essays.

1. Clear, descriptive title

How to check this: Can you place the title in another essay? If yes, it's too vague. Reference the book or the characters to make it relevant to the essay.

Not a Good Title: Mother and Daughter Problems

Good titles:

- The Sadness of Exile in ...*after*...
- Tracing the Evolution of Dalia
- You can even combine them: The Sadness of Exile: Tracing the Evolution of Dalia in ...*after*...
- *The Witch* and the Grotesque Feminine
- *Lemonade*: Black Female Empowerment and Beyoncé's Political Statement
- What's the Difference Between Choice and Happiness? Perhaps We Don't Need to Choose

2. Thesis uses a transitional phrase and has a claim based on analysis not plot.

How to check this: Does the thesis state something that happens in the book/film? If yes, that's not a thesis. Also, to fix this, highlight where you are providing an analysis in each body paragraph. If it's not your own opinion/interpretation, and instead you're simply stating the plot, rework it until you provide your opinion in each paragraph.

A thesis will explore the complexities of what happens within the plot. Think: How does this affect the characters? Why is it significant?

Not a thesis: Dalia and her brothers and sisters take care of the wall because it shows their social class, their father made it, and they like to play with it.

This is not a thesis. This is a summary of what happens in "The Wall."

Good thesis: Dalia takes care of the wall and "paints" it like a mother feeding her baby; consequently, the wall becomes a metaphor for her hope for a better future.

Not a thesis: *The Witch* is scary because the characters, who are Puritans, live through what the director calls a "Puritan nightmare."

Good thesis: Even though, *The Witch* portrays witches and the devil as real and magical, the real horror of the film centers around the moral weakness of the characters; consequently, each character comes to symbolize one of the deadly sins.

3. Introduction introduces the author, the novel, and provides context on the book/film before transitioning between major ideas.
4. The title of the book/film/album is in italics while the chapters are in quotation marks: *Lemonade*, "Formation"; *The Witch*; "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"; *Ways of Seeing*
5. Are all major claims backed up with quotes from the text?
6. Periods and commas go inside quotation marks:

She said, "Hello from the other side." Not: "...side".
7. Check for transitions between ideas/paragraphs and that they relate back to the thesis.
8. **Do not** use the second person "you" or the first person plural, "we."
9. Cite pages as: "On page 49, Dalia says,...." Or Dalia says, "....." (49). If it's a film, there are no page numbers. Simply state who says what.
10. Use different ways of quoting: paraphrase, integrated quote or direct quote.

Direct Quote: The father says, "People say that the light of the moon is good for your eyes. It refreshes your visual energy" (129).

Integrated Quote: When the story "The Hug" begins, the father says that "the light of the moon is good for your eyes" because it "refreshes your visual energy" (129).

Paraphrase: At the beginning of the story, the father tells Dalia about the benefits of moonlight. He claims that the light has the capability of refreshing one's eyes (129).

Formatting/Logo Issues

- Sources: Introduces sources first by full name and title. "According to Walter Benjamin's "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,"...
- Don't just state the title or the author. Introduce both.
- Refer to authors by last name only after the initial introduction.
Don't call them by their first names or full names. Also, don't misspell their names.
- Uses in-text citations correctly: (Martinez 5)
- Quotes: Don't leave them hanging. Do a quote "sandwich."

Don't: A transnational identity is often stuck between two worlds. "I don't feel American enough or Guatemalan. I'm in between." This is what happens when a person's identity is fragmented.

Do: A transnational identity is often stuck between two worlds. In an interview with me, my grandmother said, "I don't feel American enough or Guatemalan. I'm in between." This is what happens when a person's identity is fragmented.

- Paraphrasing and integrated quotes need in-text citations too because you're getting the ideas from the sources.

Do: The philosophical ideas behind Julia Kristeva's abject are first seen when she describes her disgust towards the film on milk (Roge 1).

Grammar Issues

- Run-on sentences. Read it out loud or if you have a PDF, you can activate the "read out loud" function. See this YouTube video for more info:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjFXq_nKCIU

- Semicolon and colon use. A semicolon is like a period. Use a colon when you're listing something or explaining what comes after. See Grammar Girl:

<http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/semicolons>

- Commas!

Do:

1. Use a comma before a direct quote ALWAYS. He said, "I will be late." Villeda states, "....." etc.
2. Use a comma before a conjunction (and/but/yet)
3. Use a comma when adding a conditional clause or added info at the beginning or end of a sentence. E.g., "If you need this by today, call me later." Or, "You need to work on your comma usage, especially if you want to be successful in your writing class."

Don't:

1. Don't add commas randomly. If you're not sure they belong, check Purdue Owl or Grammar Girl. Grammarly is also great and they have a quick source:

<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/comma/>

2. Don't add commas like a period.