

After the First Draft

As you try to move from the first full draft of your essay, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Does your essay clearly and precisely define a fundamental human question which the text you are writing about addresses? Does your essay go on to demonstrate what position -- or positions -- the text takes on this issue?
2. Does your introduction clearly and articulately identify those aspects of the text you plan to write about? Have you carefully selected those aspects which most directly and complexly address the issue you identified in step 1?
3. Does your essay proceed to do what you said you were going to do, in a well-organized and connected manner? Have you arranged your separate points in a clear and coherent pattern or form?
4. Is your paper -- to the best of your ability -- grammatically correct? Are the words spelled correctly? Not to be picky -- grammatical and typographical errors can radically reduce the cogency and persuasiveness of an essay.
5. Have you supported your arguments by specifically referring to the text? Have you avoided the tendency to propose vast generalizations? If you refer to works or to people's ideas other than those explicitly contained in the text, have you clearly identified your sources?
6. Does your essay have an effective conclusion? This should be not just a summary of what you've said but a final articulation of what you hope your reader has learned from reading your essay -- a final proof of the value of your whole line of inquiry.

To put this another way: you may have been taught that a good essay *says what it is going to say*, then *says it*, and finally *says what it has said*. True, to some degree – but profoundly boring, as well, both to write and to read. “Essay-writing for Toddlers,” but this is the Big Leagues, now. A good, even an excellent, essay often “opens out” at the end, demonstrating what the writer has learned by paying the sort of close attention he/she has. A fine essay can end, in other words, with a question, an enigma, a puzzle – something which provokes its reader to look at the text in a new way, and think about it in new and unexpected directions.

7. Have you clearly "located" any quotations you draw from the text -- using parentheses and line numbers.