The *Stop!* Sheet



*When you are studying and analyzing plays, poems, songs, novels, short stories and movies, you are being a scholar. Scholars write in a specific way. To write literary analysis, you have to learn a new way of expressing yourself. You have to stop doing a number of things that are second-nature to how you normally express yourself. Following this list will make you sound much more like a literary scholar and less like a teenager in high school.*

1. Stop saying things you don’t mean, trying to please your teacher/reader. Really. Because that’s B.S. No one likes that. You don’t need to claim to *looove* Steinbeck to get full marks on a Steinbeck essay. So don’t say stuff you don’t mean. It’s a bad practice that’s bad for you and the world.
2. Don’t **write directly to** your readerin academic writing. So *no* use of “you” or “your,” “I” or “me,” “us” or “we.” Don’t say “When **you** are living **your** life, **you**...”
3. Stop saying “**portrays.**” That word is for discussing actors playing roles or people doing historical re-enactments. In this class, use words like “introduces,” “reveals,” “expresses,” “presents,” “explores,” “conveys,” “evokes” and “elicits” instead, depending on which one fits best. Don’t use “portrays” at all in this class.
4. Stop talking about what the **characters do** and start talking about what **the writer does** instead. Write a whole lot of sentences that **start with the author’s last name**. (Use first and last, or just last name. Never use just the author’s first name. You’re not pals.)
5. Stop writing “**the novel,**” “**the protagonist**” or “**the author**” and start using their actual titles/names. Do not write “In the story, the author...” Write “In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald…”
6. Stop writing about the author or the unfolding plot in the **past tense**. Steinbeck is dead, yet you should write “Steinbeck describes” and “Steinbeck writes.” Present tense. The novel may occur in 1923, yet you should write “Linda says” and “Todd learns” (Not “Linda said” and “Todd learned”). Confusing: events that took place before the novel starts and which are discussed in it later, *may* be discussed in past tense, as using present tense for both plotlines will be confusing.
7. Stop using **passive voice**. Stop saying “The city of London is described as being ‘grey and rainy.’” Use names. **Start** saying “Orwell describes London as ‘grey and rainy.’” Stop saying “The sandwich is eaten before lunch” and start saying “Sarah eats the sandwich before lunch.”
8. Stop **telling the events of the story** for no reason. If you have written a single sentence which retells part of the story, you really have to be making a point of some kind, which requires that you then briefly mention the plot as part of that point.
9. Stop **commenting on** if you feel a literary work is good or bad, interesting or boring. **Analyze** it instead of **judging** it. Say what makes it tick instead of whether you like it. *Never* mention if you find a book confusing or hard to read. Academic writing is not about you and any limits there may be to your reading skills or attention span. Don’t mention that things in the book “**will keep the reader wanting more**.” It isn’t really the primary job of an academic to judge if an author is *entertaining to kids* or not. So don’t use that phrase in this class. It isn’t useful for us.
10. **View** the works studied as successful, published works. They have already succeeded. Someone already paid to have them published. Write about the **author** reaching his or her **readers** and making them think and feel things. You are a third thing: a **scholar**, who isn’t going to be mentioned. Be bold. Say what the work is. Say how the work works. Say what the work says.
11. Stop putting **“firstly,” “secondly,” “thirdly,” “finally”** and **“in conclusion.”** They are too ‘elementary school public speaking contest.’ Do better than that. Bridge gaps with better transition words like “To begin with,” “For example,” “Another reason” “Perhaps most obviously,” “Additionally,” “An even more obvious way that Orwell,” “In this same vein,” or “As well,”
12. Stop using **the names of the literary elements** directly (avoid actually saying “setting” and “main character” and “plot” and “foreshadowing” at all) Talk about them without name-dropping them. So instead of saying “The setting of *A Tale of Two Cities* is London and Paris during the French Revolution,” write “*A Tale of Two Cities* takes place in London and Paris during the French Revolution.” Stop saying “the necklace is a metaphor for Roger and Edith’s lost love.” Write “the necklace represents Roger and Edith’s lost love.” Stop saying “This is character development” and start saying “Steinbeck further reveals George’s character in this chapter by…”
13. Stop using **more words than are necessary**. Express *more* ideas, with *fewer* words. What is the smallest number of words you can clearly express an idea in? (This is like asking “Which is the sharpest knife for carving the turkey?”) Stop being fancy and long-winded and start being confident, strong, clear and concise (short). Turn up the volume, rather than soaking essays in flowery perfume.
14. Stop saying “**would be**” or “**would have to be**” when you mean “is.” Your favourite book “would not have to be” anything. It is *The Hunger Games*, or *The Two Towers* or whatever. “Would be” is saved for theoretical, imaginary circumstances, and is not useful for talking about real ones.
15. Stop **weakening your writing** with ‘softening’ words like “in my opinion,” “seems,” “maybe,” “rather,” “somewhat” or “probably.” In fact, *strengthen* it with words like “clearly,” “definitely,” “indisputably,” “remarkably,” “obviously,” “painfully,” “horribly,” “heartbreakingly” and “plainly” whenever possible, to sound sure of yourself and less dull.
16. Don’t use “**super**” to mean “very.” In fact, use “extremely” or “noticeably” or “remarkably.”
17. Stop quoting from the work, by **first putting the opening quotation mark at the beginning of your sentence**. Your quoting sentence needs to start with some words you will write, and then have that opening quotation mark come in the middle of that quoting sentence you’re writing. So, use wording like Golding describes Piggy by writing that “He [is] shorter than the fair boy and very fat.” or Lee has Atticus remark that Jem is ‘far too old and too big for such childish things, and the sooner [he learns] to hold them in, the better off everybody [will] be” Let your quotations make your points by **finishing your sentences** for you. But you have to *start* those sentences. You can use “…” to skip bits, and you can use [square brackets] to change wording slightly to match your sentence better.
18. Stop putting “**many**” and then not putting ANY specific examples. “Many” is a promise of specifics. You have to deliver on that promise, and with more than just one. Every time you promise me “many” I want three. If you’re going to claim it, name it. Give specific details instead of making broad, general comments that are hard to support with evidence.
19. Stop making reference to authors doing things to “**make the reader understand more clearly**” or “**to make it easier to read**” or anything like that. At the high school level, one assumes that authors aren’t writing easy-to-read stories for struggling readers. Assume that most adults can read the story, and that so, therefore, can you. Because Shakespeare, Dickens, Tolstoy, Austen, and Orwell obviously aren’t really terribly worried about “the reader understanding” anything easily.
20. Don’t use the word “**prove,**” “**proving**” or “**proves**” in this course. Say that something “gives support for the idea” or “is evidence of” instead. In the world of academia, almost everything is in doubt, so there can be endless discussion, and nothing really is “proven.” Nothing of interest, anyway.