ESSAYS: To write effective essays in this course, please observe these essential points from Ch. 41 (in the Writing volume, Part 4):

1. **Read actively**—this means to read, re-read, and annotate the texts you are reading, to read for enjoyment as well as analysis of the work’s structure, composition, and implications for the reader (K & G 1891-2).

2. **Plan your writing**—this means that you write about the works using an actual method: the writing process (1893).

3. **Develop a literary argument**—this means that you write your essay for a defined audience, about a narrowed topic, with a specific purpose, and a “clear, decisive thesis.” The thesis will be an arguable claim about the work that seeks to persuade the audience using evidence, credibility, a “thoughtful tone,” organization, and consideration to opposing viewpoints (1898-9).
   
   a. For *Literary Analysis Essays* (LAE’s):
   
   ✓ focus on the *primary source* itself & *your* interpretations of it;  
   ✓ thesis statement claims something about the primary source & a specific literary element or two; and  
   ✓ consults and uses textual support from one or two secondary sources to compliment or contrast interpretations.

   Additional explanation and a sample analysis essay can be found on pp. 1923-26 (analysis of short story), pp. 1950-52 (analysis of poem), and pp. 1962 (analysis of play).

   b. For the *Critical Research Essay* (CRE):
   
   ✓ focus on *secondary sources & critical perspectives* about the primary source;  
   ✓ thesis statement claims something about critical perspectives on the primary source as a whole; and  
   ✓ provides a survey of literary criticism.

   Additional explanation and a sample research essay can be found on pp. 334-39 (in the Fiction volume, Part 1).

4. **Draft the essay**—this means that you materialize your argument about the work into a tentative draft of the final essay (1900). Borrowed material should be documented within the body wherever appropriate.

5. **Revise the essay**—this means that you scrutinize your draft for an effective thesis, adequate support, sound reasoning, coherence, and a gripping style and title. A partner will help you examine for these things during peer review (1902-5).

6. **Document carefully to avoid plagiarism**—this means that, in the spirit of respecting our learning community, you insure all necessary parenthetical references and coinciding works consulted/annotated bibliography entries have been included in your final essay (1909-10). See pp. 1984-9 for sample parenthetical references and works cited lists.
Besides writing essays, we may also employ these methods for writing about literature:

**EXPLICATIONS:** These are “patient unfolding[s] of meanings in a literary work”; line-by-line interpretations of key scenes, critical conversations, statements of theme, or opening/closing paragraphs, for example. Explications are shorter—a few paragraphs—and may be written for quizzes or in-class activities. Explications are commonly written from the Formalist critical approach; however, we may employ the other critical approaches in our explications as well. See the following page numbers for tips and examples of explicating the three major genres.

1. Fiction, p. 1920
2. Poetry, p. 1946
3. Drama, p. 1962

**CARD REPORTS:** These are concise answers written on a 5x8 index card that respond to basic questions about a play’s or short story’s most essential elements. Writing an effective card report demonstrates your ability to distill a play or short story to its most essential elements and themes, and, “describe them succinctly and accurately” (1926). Further explanations and example card report can be found on pp. 1926-29 and pp. 1962-65.

**DRAMA REVIEWS:** These are critical evaluations of dramatic performances. Writing a review requires that you be familiar with the written work beforehand, so that you may judge the quality of various productions. Here are some questions to address in a drama review:

1. “What are the conventions of this type of play, and how well does the play fulfill those conventions?” (For example, is the play intended to be a tragedy? Comedy? Are specific character types or events expected? . . . )
2. “Are the plays main characters fully realized?”
4. Does the performance remain true to the script? What impact does this have?

Additional explanation and a sample drama review can be found on pp. 1966-68 (and pp. 1678-79 in the Drama volume, Part 3).

**ANNOTATIONS:** These are the summary and evaluation paragraphs that appear on your annotated bibliography or annotated works consulted list. Annotations consist of one or two paragraphs beneath the MLA citation that:

1. describe the source for your readers;
2. evaluate the source’s credibility; and
3. explain how the source was used in your essay.

If you borrowed material from a source, include it on your annotated bibliography (the last page of your essay); if you simply read the source for background, but did not borrow material, include it on an annotated works consulted list (another page after the annotated bibliography).