

## Quick Tips: What to Avoid in Essays for English, Drama, and Film

**NOTE:** For the purposes of this handout a **text** can refer to a prose text, poem, play, film, non-fiction, etc. A **producer** can refer to an author, poet, playwright, director, producer, etc.

- Providing **personal opinions** based on taste or what you *think* is valuable. It does not matter whether you think a text is “good” or not. Remember, academic writing is about analysis; it is not a book or film club.
- Making speculative arguments or assumptions, e.g. **reader and viewer experiences/feelings**, or **producer intentions/motivations**.
- Only **focusing on content** (e.g. what happens in the plot). You *must* also address **form** and literary/cinematic/theatrical/poetic/rhetorical devices like structure, diction, syntax, etc. *How* a story or argument is told is as important to analysis as *what* is being told.
- **Providing unnecessary/ too many block quotations**, especially in shorter essays. It is often preferable to use shorter quotations that are peppered throughout so you can provide more effective close reading of the text. You must unpack what is happening in the quotations and references you provide, and you should not assume that the reader can infer what the quotation proves/shows without explanation.
- **Speculating about the biography** of the producer, or how we can “read” that biography into the text. This is critical analysis, not psychoanalysis, and you should stick to the minute details of the text like glue. Remember that a biographical argument requires evidence to support the claim.
- Getting lost in the **historical context** of the text. Although context can support your interpretations of a text, you are writing a textual analysis and not a history assignment.
- Using “**flowery**” or “**poetic**” language. Students often confuse academic analysis with creative writing. Remember, this is an academic discipline, and, like all academic writing, your tone/register should be active, objective, and clear.
- Using **secondary sources** without evident justification. It must be demonstrably clear how and why you are using a source for support, and what exactly that source is contributing to your research and observations.
- Merely **summarising the plot** throughout your assignment; your focus should always be on analysis, so assume your reader knows the material. Also, avoid providing citations for mere plot summary, rather than direct quotations, e.g. “Charles Dickens’ novel *Great Expectations* depicts the education of the orphan Pip (Dickens, 1861)”; the citation here is unnecessary.
- Using **contractions** like “it’s” and “shouldn’t”. Write the words out in full (“it is” and “it should not”).
- Using secondary **sources** that are not scholarly and peer-reviewed. You should be using such sources as academic monographs, journal articles, etc.