

## ENGLISH: WRITING CONVENTIONS — PART II (UPPER YEAR)

Whereas Writing Conventions—Part I reviewed some of the academic writing conventions for first year English courses, this handout will overview some of the conventions for upper year English courses.

### Using Sentence Variety



As students become more comfortable writing English essays they can work on varying sentence structure, which includes using a mixture of shorter and longer sentences, and experimenting with different sentence structures. Using varied rather than uniform sentences can help push students toward greater creativity in both their thinking and writing.



### Making Connections

One convention in more advanced English academic writing is to make *connections* both within texts and across texts (including theory texts). The goal is to bring together disparate passages, theories and ideas in an unusual or interesting way; this synthesis creates an essay that stands out from the rest. Building a more complex English argument often requires connecting a primary text to a theory (or theories) and also incorporating additional resources, such as journal articles, book reviews, the author's entire oeuvre (not just one text), historical details about the time period, and more. Upper year English assignments become quite intertextual and interdisciplinary as students develop the ability to consider a text in relation to others and draw connections between literary texts and theory.



### Engaging with Theory

As noted above, a more advanced English convention is connecting literary analysis to *theory*. One way of thinking about “theory” is that it helps to “make the familiar seem strange;” that is, theory helps us question the existent (i.e. why things are the way they are), challenge dominant norms and assumptions, and reveal systemic injustices and inequalities. Engaging with theory in your English assignments could entail a multitude of different approaches; it might mean applying psychoanalysis, or taking a Marxist approach, or considering a feminist perspective, or experimenting with any number of other possibilities. By engaging with theory, students are able to construct arguments about how literary texts shape and are shaped by the world around us.



### Taking a Multi-Disciplinary Approach

Whether one prefers the term “interdisciplinary,” “transdisciplinary,” or “antidisciplinary,” another English writing convention is that outstanding upper year English papers tend to blend literary analyses with ideas from other disciplines. These disciplines may include, but are not limited to: Geography, History, Religion, Political Science, Philosophy, Psychology, Cultural Studies, Race and Gender Studies, Fine Art, Mythology, Biology, Science Studies, Information Science, and more. Some English courses may cover material from other disciplines during lectures (for example, a 19th century literature course may include a historical discussion of the period); however, other times the onus is on students to follow their curiosity and seek out new ideas and connections in other subject areas.

