Some advice for writing papers in English courses

**Basic Writing Advice:**

* Do not make unsupported generalizations (eg, about the history of the world, or the nature of human psychology, such as 'it is widely known that Western culture is essentially dominatory').
* Do not express opinions that are unsupported by evidence.
* If giving empirical information (eg, information about a historical period), please provide a source for your information.
* Do not misuse the apostrophe (this includes using ‘it’s’ instead of ‘its’; using apostrophes before an ‘s’ to indicate a plural noun, omitting to use them to mark possession).
* Do not write paragraphs that are as long as a page or longer. In general, when this occurs it often means that the paragraph loses focus at some point.
* Do not use dangling modifiers, such as ‘Having finished her assignment, the television was turned on’. This leaves unclear who is doing what to whom.
* Do not write sentences that aren’t sentences because they lack a verb.
* Make sure that the sentence subject and verb agree.

**Advice for writing about literature**

* Regarding essay titles: I prefer essay titles that set up a concept, or issue, to be explored. Subtitles can be useful to give more detail to the concept or issue.
* In English literary studies it is conventional to discuss plot action in the *present tense*. Therefore, it should be “Tamba opens the door,” *not* Tamba opened the door.”
* Do not describe the literary text: analyze it. Assume that the reader is familiar with the

plot and characters when writing about fiction.

* Unless you have been directed to provide your personal opinion about a text, avoid phrases like ‘I think’ or ‘I believe’ or ‘In my opinion.’ Instead, you should be advancing logical, developed *claims* about the text.
* Remember when writing essays on fiction or drama, that characters are not real people. You need to think about the way in which the writer, or text, presents characters: they are literary inventions, and representations.
* Also be aware that a fictional text consists of much more than its characters. Other elements of a text include structure; imagery; language; ideology; intertextual relationship to other texts.