ESSAY CHECKLIST

1. INTRODUCTION

• Does the introduction mention the text under discussion? (underlined or italicized if it is the title of a long work—a play, a novel, a really long poem; put in quotation marks if it is the title of a short work—a short poem, a short story, an article)
• Does it make a thoughtful, disputable thesis claim about what the text does or means?
• Is it distinct from what others have argued? Feel free to complicate an argument you generally agree with or disagree with an argument you find unconvincing.
• Could the thesis be improved upon, made more clear, less general?
• Is the thesis statement general enough?
  subjective/opinionated enough?
  controversial enough?
  grammatically complex enough?
• What is the antithesis (or straw man) of this thesis? Is it too weak? Too obvious? (Every good thesis should be able to imagine an intelligent argument against it)
• What scholarly conversation are you participating in? (can you provide the context for your claims?)
• Have you provided your reader with a sense of your “roadmap”: how you will tackle this question? You can do this overtly—by saying I will address x, y and z, or implicitly by providing a summary of your argument and then addressing points in the sequence you have raised them.

2. PARAGRAPHS

In sentence form, on a draft, see if you can state the mini-thesis (claim) for each paragraph. Usually, each mini-thesis should appear first in the paragraph, followed by sentences that provide examples to support this claim. If your paragraphs do not do this, reorganize/structure the paragraph(s) to solve this problem.
• Does each paragraph build on the argument achieved in the previous?
• Do you use appropriate transitions between paragraphs?
  Suggestions: Like, Instead of, Just as, Similarly, In spite of, In contrast to, While, Whereas, Rather than, However....
• Is literary action described in the present tense (correct) as opposed to the past tense (incorrect)?
• Do you quote accurately and effectively to summarize a point you agree with or disagree with, or to provide an example from your primary text? (Be sure to indent longer quotations—3 lines or more—and incorporate shorter quotations into your paragraph).
• Are accurate references given to pages (22) or scenes (III, ii, 22-24) or lines (ll. 22-24)?
• Are pages numbered?
• Do you avoid constructing an argument in a "list" style?
• Are you, as the reader, convinced by the writer's argument?

3. STYLE

• Have you checked for spelling and grammatical errors?
• Is there an appropriate mixture of sentence types and lengths?
Can you turn passive voice sentences into active voice?

4. CONCLUSION
   - Does the conclusion summarize, but not repeat what has been proved?

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY
   - Do you comply with MLA citation style? (see website)

6. ORIGINALITY
   - Is this your own work? (please consult the Plagiarism guide at the bookstore for information on the penalties for academic dishonesty)