

SAMPLE OUTLINE ASSIGNMENT #2: *Romeo and Juliet/Much Ado About Nothing*

SKETCH OUTLINE

The sketch outline requires the author to be very clear about the focus of each section. In the "headline" format, you cannot be vague or wishy-washy; you must clarify for yourself exactly what you are looking at, and can get an "at a glance" overview of the structure.

What this outline does well:

- a working thesis that shows a WHAT and a SO WHAT;
- essay "movements" or categories that demonstrate clear BASES OF COMPARISON;
- essay "movements" or categories that demonstrate a logical progression from establishing a pattern (sections III-IV) to expressing why this pattern is significant (sections V-VI);
- "sub-movements" that clearly but concisely indicate what aspects of the text will be used in the argument
- a conclusion that ties the essay outline together with an overall statement of significance.

What this outline could do better:

- the BASES OF COMPARISON could be more clearly articulated; as it is, they are there, but they must be intuited: (III-IV = DEFINITION OF LOVE; V-VI = CONSEQUENCES OF THOSE DEFINITIONS for the CHARACTERS' SENSE OF SELF)

This sketch outline allows the instructor to get a "snap shot" of the paper and to see at a glance what logical structure the author is going to use to organize the material.

WORKING OUTLINE

The working outline provides an elaboration of the sketch outline that indicates key terms and elements that will be indispensable to the argument. It adds the WHAT (the raw material) to the STRUCTURE (the sections/headlines) and states the SO WHAT (overall significance) of the argument.

What the outline does well:

- Introduction focuses on a general tendency in our reading (to glorify Romeo and Juliet as paragons of the ideal love) and suggests, first, the misconception inherent in that reading and, second, the way that the second play offers a corrective;
- Thesis identifies the focus (what) and the broader significance having to do with a redefinition of love that is based on self-concept; Body includes direct references to the texts to indicate the kinds of support the argument will use;
- Body matches the thesis in terms of focus, argument and conclusion—it does what the thesis says it will do;

- Conclusion restates the reason for doing the analysis—to put right a misconception about how R&J are viewed—and sums up the argument.

What the outline could do better:

- Make the thesis more significant: the thesis could be more specific about the role of self-concept, and some indication in the introduction about the attitude toward self-concept in the period would add a further level of significance. The conclusion is a clue—the general statements referring to an amorphous "you" is a bit wishy-washy for a thesis/conclusion. A more effective thesis/conclusion would focus on the significance of self-concept in these particular plays, with some reference to how they fit in relative to prevailing attitudes in Shakespeare's day toward the idea of self-concept. In other words, don't end on a soft generalization that can slide toward platitude ("be yourself" or "don't judge a book by its cover" or "love thy neighbour");
- Include SECONDARY SOURCES to indicate what kinds of substantiation from the critical field will be included—historical context? Theoretical models? Other critical close readings?
- Some indication of where this "general reading" that is being challenged in the introduction comes from. A pithy quotation from a reputable critic would ensure that this critique of the "misconception" in the general sense of R&J as paragons isn't just a "straw man";
- SO WHAT or TRANSITION SENTENCES between the movements to indicate how the author sees the movements of the argument relating to the thesis and to each other.