How to Do Well on Your Research Paper

✓ Use Times New Roman/12 pt. Font/Double Spaced/ 1” margins (including the Works Cited page!!).
✓ Put your (revised and wonderfully worded) thesis at the end of your introduction.
✓ Support your thesis throughout the entire paper. Focus on it! If something doesn’t support your thesis, jettison it!
✓ Incorporate your own thoughts into the analysis—without using first person (no I, we) or second person (you).
✓ Use topic sentences to connect with/support thesis and include specific terms/concepts from the theory/theories you are using (e.g., commodification, gender roles, internalized racism, metaphor, etc.).
✓ Use transitional words to connect your support and discussion within body paragraphs. (See handout.)
✓ Page numbers begin on the first page of your paper in a header. Use “insert page##” tab.
✓ Include a title on the first page, centered; it should indicate your thesis/main claim and should be creative. (Something like White Flight: Motifs of Empowerment in Song of Solomon is better than Symbols and Metaphors in The Great Gatsby, for example)
✓ Direct quotes are in quotation marks and are properly cited. (See handout.)
✓ Paraphrased ideas from articles AND paraphrased passages from your novel/text are also cited!
✓ Quotations more than four (4) lines long need to be offset (2”), double spaced, without quotation marks. (See example on handout.)
✓ Use a variety of integration types. (See commas, colons, and single words/phrases on “Refresher” handout.)
✓ Proof read your paragraphs OUT LOUD as you draft them, and proof your whole paper 1,000 more times before submitting. Remember to GO FOR IT in your writing: Reach for the deep analysis, make connections you didn’t think you could notice, and try sentence structures you haven’t tried before. Make your paper striking and profound to read!
✓ Include quotations from your chosen text AND secondary sources—probably both in every paragraph. But include MORE of your own analysis of the text and ideas than either of these others.

✓ A really strong conclusion wraps things up and includes some “So what?”—some connection between your analysis, the text, and the world in which all of us live. Don’t merely summarize all of your points and re-state your thesis. That, my friends, is adequate but pretty lame. Don’t be merely adequate! End with a bang.

✓ Verb tense agreement. This includes the “literary present tense,” in which you discuss a character in a book, for example, as if s/he is acting in the present (which s/he really is, as the text comes alive each time we open the book or cite it in our papers. Think about it.). For example, in Song of Solomon, Milkman and Pilate travel to Virginia, where Guitar tracks Milkman.

✓ Include your information in a logical order. Think about what ideas should come first in each paragraph, and carefully consider what order to place your paragraphs.

✓ Don’t you dare forget the Works Cited page. This is important for your paper and for your grade. (A research paper is truly incomplete without it, and you can’t just submit it separately after the fact.)

✓ Check grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization. Are you kidding that you would not at least run spell check on your paper? (I’m about to run it on this doc right now! There, all done.) However, be wary of Microsoft Word or Google when it comes to grammar and punctuation. Use your eyes and ears! Ask if you are unsure of something.

✓ NO CONTRACTIONS!! Don’t you dare use don’t! And you can’t use can’t! (Use do not or cannot, my friends. These notes are much less formal than your paper.)

✓ NO FIRST OR SECOND PERSON! (Didn’t I/we already say that to you? Not for formal writing.)

✓ NO RUN-ONS or FRAGMENTS or COMMA SPLICES!

✓ NO PLAGIARISM. I hate that I have to even mention it. Be your honest and best self. That is how you will learn, and you will feel much better about turning in your own work. And I truly appreciate reading your own words and ideas—rather than those of some schmuck from the Internet.

✓ That is all. No, proof read it once more.