

**Theatre Arts Department**  
**2023 Annual Assessment Report**  
**Appendix 1: Short Executive Summary**

**I. Background and Context**

During the 2022-2023 Academic Year the department entertained extensive conversations about whether the department's Written Effectiveness PLO could be changed in order to more fully exhibit a range of effective writing in theatre and drama. For many years, Written Effectiveness has been assessed solely in the department's Theatre History courses – TA 120 (The Stage's Use of History from the Greeks to the Present) and TA 121 (The History of Acting and Directing).

The department considered two major issues: 1) whether Written Effectiveness might be displayed in the department's creative courses; and 2) Since Professor John Blondell has shouldered the load of assessing student writing, could the department more equally share the assessment load between individual faculty members?

The department discussed both issues at length, and engaged Professor Sarah Skripsky to help the department weigh the various issues in a proposed change to its Written Effectiveness Outcome, which presently reads: Students apply discipline-specific research methodologies in crafting effective writing about theatrical practice.

Following lengthy discussions and considerations, and a working lunch with Professor Skripsky in April 2023, the department concluded that it is best to assess Written Effectiveness right where it is – in the Theatre History sequence. Consequently, for the 2022 and 2023, the department assessed the following Outcomes in TA 120 – The Stage's Use of History from the Greeks to the Renaissance.

**II. Specific Learning Outcome for Disciplinary Written Effectiveness, TA 120**

- *Student Learning Outcome 1*  
*Students will develop a precise thesis and fully developed arguments in their writing.*
- *Student Learning Outcome 2*  
*Students will be able to produce accurate discipline-specific research in their writing.*

**III. The Assignment**

The major writing assignment for TA 120 involves a 2,500-word essay, where students, using primary sources, create a stage history for four important (or not so) Shakespearean productions of the last 25 years from the local, regional, national, or international stage. For this essay, students receive a rubric and key to the rubric that explains Written Effectiveness for this assignment. Students provide a draft, and the professor creates a marked up rubric, a letter grade, and specific feedback on work submitted, both in written and oral form. Students use the feedback to prepare revisions of the essays, which are due on the dates indicated. At that time, more written feedback will be offered, and students have, as an option, the opportunity to continue revising their work. In other words, all students revise each written assignment at least one time during the course of the semester, and may revise essays as many times as they wish, at least until the hour glass of the semester runs its course.

#### IV. Summaries of Written Feedback

The following represent samples of written feedback for three individual Theatre Arts majors.

Student 1

This is very good and it's only going to get better! You select three fascinating performances, describe and write about them well, and develop a concise, literate, informed, and illuminating analysis of the productions. Lovely! Take a look at the marginalia – fix the first sentence as the play is the first play in the first cycle of English History Plays. Take a look at various punctuation suggestions/errors and fix those, and fix the non-sentence in the introduction. As to more substantive things, can you add some images to the essay, so the reader sees what you see? I think your descriptions are very good – it would be great to have representations of the various images you describe. **In addition, make a more concrete and vivid thesis statement. Your essay seems to focus on revolutionary, ground-breaking performances that say as much about the time of the performances as the play itself. Make that more clear, complete, and concise.** Make that Kean's production indeed marks a highpoint of pictorialism in the theatre. You can use that word, by the way – it's a thing. 19<sup>th</sup> century Pictorial Shakespeare used the new found vogue for the historical past to create theatre of incredible spectacle. I have a source for you – you can grab a phrase or two to describe Pictorialism in this sense of the play. The same source can give you more grist for your mill regarding the Barton production. Remind me – I will give to you. Take a look at the chapters relative to those productions to see what you can use, to develop an approach that focuses on productions that were *revolutionary or otherwise groundbreaking at the time of their performances*. Nice Start!

C+

This is a lovely revision. **The thesis is tighter and more focused, and the descriptions stand out because you added the images to which they correspond.** This is lovely. The first sentence is still not clear, though. *Richard* is not the first of the cycle; it's the first *play of the cycle*. Fix this and it's an A. GREAT!

A

### Student 2

This is a very good start – in fact, I would say it's some of the best writing you have done for me. You select three interesting productions, and you do an excellent job explaining the revelatory, ground-breaking aspects of them. The writing is for the most part clear and concise, and there is a story in here that is worth telling. OK – some things to work on. First of all, where are the citations? Why are there no citations in the essay? Please come see me if you don't understand what I mean. **Second of all, develop a more clear and concise thesis statement, and pin the discussion about the plays to that thesis.** Second of all, as you can see from my margin notes, you tend to say the same thing about the productions again and again and sometimes again. It's like each paragraph is a little mini essay, and you start again with the same information, and simply reword the previous paragraph. Say the things you say ONE Time. Unfold the essay to new and more interesting things. Also, can you include some photos that you describe? Also, it's a great idea to quote some of the reviews. You mention that the reviews are good – give a few examples, and then describe why the reviews are important, from your point of view, for the production. Also, I think you need to develop better organization for the first production. Work from general ideas to more specific ones. You start with specific ones, jump to general, and then jump to a reiteration of specific ones. The organization of your essay needs work. So you have some things to do!

Great start – Keep Going!

C-

Where are the citations? The organization problems aren't fixed. The thesis statement is acceptable.

C/C-

### Student 3

Well, this is terrific! It's Mega Late, but it's TERRIFIC nonetheless. I think that London Theatre Mayterm was a huge benefit to your writing, analytical, and reviewing skills, and your writing is showing it Big Time. The essay is vividly and thoughtfully written and carefully researched. It's really wonderful. OK – here are some things to work on. Please get me these revisions by Thursday. First, look at the few margin notes I make. Write in the present tense regarding the productions – you write in the past tense about the Bitola H63, and in the present for the other

two. Make that consistent throughout. Also, make sure you cite everything you use. The comments about the significance of the gender bent casting in the Bitola H63 actually comes from a review, and even though you paraphrase it, it's still somebody else's original insight, so you need to attribute it to that reviewer. Also, take a look at the provenance of *Rose Rage*. It originated by Hall's Propeller Company in 02, I think, then perhaps developed by CST in 03? Anyway, talk a bit about that historical story, because it seems like the CST production is a stand alone production in your review, but it actually had a history before it came over the pond. And can you find any photos for that? You have photos for the other shows; it seems a bit vacant to not have photos for this one. **Last, please make a more potent thesis statement. How do these productions hang together? Your intro is interesting, with nice writing, but there's not real thesis here. You seem to get at it when you mention the "variety" of the productions, but perhaps you can tease out something more specific and particular. Maybe something to do with various innovations of the shows?** Bring out the video, the gender bending, and the meat? Variety is a bit vanilla – make it more potent and poppy. Keep Going!!

B-

The revisions in verb tense are better and the inclusion of photos is good. Very good thesis statement. MLA format is improved. B+ for revision. Very Late. B

## V. Assessment and Short Discussion

Using the rubric and key to the rubric found in Appendix 2 and 2A, the following general conclusions were drawn:

1. In first drafts, students have trouble creating clear thesis statements and arguments.
2. Students are vague about how to use MLA style for their essays.
3. Following the feedback loop, students improve!!

## VI. Final Observations

Departmental work in the Written Effectiveness PLO was rich and rewarding. The department enjoyed significant discussions within the department, and with Sarah Skripsky who helped guide our conversations very much. The department made clear and logical decisions about how to move forward with disciplinary writing in our department. The assignment developed data that suggests more time might be spent during the course about 1) what constitutes Written Effectiveness for a Theatre Arts major; 2) how to craft thesis statements and provide coherent arguments/discussion for the exploration thereof; and 3) how to better equip students in writing that uses MLA format.

## Appendix 2: Grading Rubric for Theatre Research Essay

	<b>STRUCTURE &amp; ORGANIZATION</b>	<b>ARGUMENT &amp; ANALYSIS</b>	<b>USE OF EVIDENCE</b>	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHIC FORMAT &amp; SOURCES</b>	<b>STYLE &amp; MECHANICS</b>
<b>A</b>	<p>Essay has a compelling purpose. Introduction contextualizes issue and engages reader; thesis is precise, original, and sophisticated; transitions clarify relationships of ideas; paragraphs cohere and build substantively on one another; conclusion demonstrates substantive reflection.</p>	<p>Response to topic is insightful and original, and fully addresses the prompt. Essay offers a compelling and fully developed argument, clearly laid out. No gaps in logic are present. Analysis is excellent. Answers “so what?” question.</p>	<p>Essay provides compelling and accurate evidence that convinces the reader to accept the main argument. Significant and persuasive examples illustrate all points. Quotation and paraphrase are relevant, incorporated skillfully, and analyzed explicitly.</p>	<p>Impeccable MLA citation style throughout. Correct parenthetical citation of all sources; sources used appear correctly in list of works cited. Minimum source requirements exceeded. All sources are reliable and discipline-specific.</p>	<p>The writing is polished and distinctive, and rivets the attention of the audience. Diction is vivid and precise. Consistent use of standard grammar, punctuation, and spelling.</p>

B	<p>Essay has a clear purpose; digressions from purpose are rare. Introduction is informative; thesis is interesting and makes an argumentative claim; transitions are generally smooth; paragraphs cohere and sequence is logical; conclusion goes beyond summary.</p>	<p>Response to topic is thoughtful and purposeful, and addresses the prompt. Ideas are developed. Essay offers an argument that unfolds logically; few, if any mental leaps are required. Analysis is steady. Considers “so what?”</p>	<p>Essay provides necessary evidence to convince the reader of most points of the main argument. Effective examples illustrate most points. Quotation and paraphrase are generally relevant, incorporated grammatically, and at least partially contextualized.</p>	<p>Very few errors in MLA citation style. Largely correct parenthetical citation of sources; all sources appear in list of works cited, with some style errors. All minimum source requirements met. Most sources are reliable and discipline-specific.</p>	<p>The writing is concise and fluent, and typically holds the attention of the audience. Diction is concrete, fitting, and solid. Few deviations from standard grammar, punctuation, and spelling.</p>
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C	<p>Essay's central purpose is not consistently clear; reasoning wanders. Introduction is pedestrian; thesis is present but vague, self-evident, or unoriginal; transitions are lacking; paragraphs have lapses in coherence and/or do not build upon one another in logical progression; conclusion is merely a summary, or lacks reflection on implications.</p>	<p>Response to topic is appropriate but needs more sustained thinking; the scope of the prompt is only partially addressed. Points are left undeveloped. Reader must construct an argument from the text and/or supply needed analysis. Analysis is often superficial. "So what?" gets short shrift.</p>	<p>Essay provides some evidence to support an argument, but evidence is incomplete or oversimplified. Ineffective examples are employed in illustrating points. Quotation and paraphrase are present, but lack relevance, are awkwardly or ungrammatically incorporated, and/or lack analysis to connect them with the author's claims.</p>	<p>Errors in MLA citation style. Some missing parenthetical citations; all sources appear in list of works cited, but with partial or incorrect documentation . Most source requirements met. Some sources taken from questionable or general, rather than discipline-specific, references.</p>	<p>The writing is bland or stilted, only sometimes engaging the attention of the audience. Diction is generally clear and fitting with occasional vague, clichéd, or incorrect wording. Occasional comma splices, fragments, misspellings, or other errors.</p>
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D	<p>Essay's central purpose is generally unclear; little thought is evident in either topic selection or execution. Introduction is absent or fails to demonstrate topic's significance; thesis is missing, difficult to identify, or aimless; organization is haphazard, ideas fail to make sense together; some paragraphs are repetitive or irrelevant; conclusion is missing, or fails to offer any meaningful comment.</p>	<p>Response to topic is inadequate. The prompt's aims are addressed insufficiently. Little or no attempt is made to articulate an argument. Reader must generate all substantive analysis. Subject is not comprehended ; analysis breaks down. "So what?" is unconsidered.</p>	<p>Essay provides little evidence or misrepresents ideas. Examples are often missing, or are overly generalized, ramble, or lack supporting details. Quotation and paraphrase are insufficient, excessive, or inaccurate, or presented without contextualization .</p>	<p>Serious or pervasive errors in MLA style. Complete parenthetical citation often missing; some sources do not appear in list of works cited. Failure to alphabetize works cited list. Source requirements not met. Discipline-specific references not consulted. Use of Wikipedia or other highly inappropriate sources.</p>	<p>The writing is awkward and generally unable to hold the attention of the audience. Diction is frequently clichéd, repetitive, vague, or incorrect. Repeated comma splices, fragments, or other serious deviations.</p>
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<b>F</b>	<p>Essay has no central purpose or is of an unacceptable length. Paragraphs thoroughly fail to comprehend subject. Internal structure generates no momentum.</p>	<p>Response to topic is wholly deficient. The prompt is disregarded. Intent is aimless. Little thought is evident.</p>	<p>Essay makes factual errors. Examples are absent or irrelevant. Quotation and paraphrase are inappropriate, inaccurate or absent.</p>	<p>MLA citations omitted. No parenthetical documentation . List of works cited absent. Plagiarism.</p>	<p>The writing is clumsy and fails to engage the audience. Diction confounds comprehension . Pervasive grammatical errors.</p>
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#### Appendix 2A) Key to Rubric for Theatre Research Essays

	Standards for Mastery
Structure & organization	Purpose of essay is readily apparent to the reader. Essay is focused, unified, and logical throughout, with elegant use of transitional devices to articulate relationships between ideas. Paragraphs are unified and cohesive, and build substantively upon one another in ways that effectively serve the progress of the argument. The reader can follow the line of reasoning.
Introduction	Succinctly contextualizes issue and establishes its significance in lively, engaging prose.
Thesis statement	Precise, carefully considered, and original, making a clear, specific, sophisticated, and plausible argumentative claim.
Conclusion	Goes beyond summary to show serious reflection; demonstrates the implications of argument for reader. Resolves the importance of the argument for the reader.
Use of evidence	Essay provides compelling and accurate evidence that convinces the reader to accept the main argument. Examples are used to support all points. The importance and relevance of all pieces of evidence is clearly stated. Essay offers fresh readings of critical sources, clearly and accurately summarizing their contributions and limitations, and linking them together in a convincing framework. Alternate or conflicting interpretations of evidence are thoughtfully considered and responded to in ways that ultimately buttress the author's main argument.
Quotation & paraphrase	Text is properly quoted and paraphrased, and is skillfully, gracefully, and grammatically integrated into the argument. Each quotation is explicitly analyzed to show how the passage serves as evidence for the argument.

Analysis & argument	Essay contains a compelling and original argument that is clearly laid out for the reader. Analysis is insightful, offering a fresh and illuminating take on the evidence. There are no gaps in reasoning; the reader does not need to assume anything or do additional research to accept the main argument. "So What?" question is answered consistently.
Style	The writing is compelling, polished, and distinctive. It hooks the reader and sustains interest throughout. Sentences are skillfully constructed and distinctive, varied in length and structure, and flow smoothly from one to another.
Diction	Masterful use of language. Diction is vivid, vigorous, fresh, and precise. No words are misused.
Grammar & mechanics	Consistent use of standard grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Fragments, comma splices, and run-on sentences are scrupulously avoided, dependent clause markers are used appropriately, words are spelled properly, and punctuation marks are used correctly.
Bibliographic format	Proper MLA citation style throughout. All quotations and paraphrases include complete and accurate parenthetical citation in the text. All entries in the List of Works Cited are accurate, complete, alphabetized, and referenced in the text, and include all the necessary information in the correct order, properly punctuated. No authors are misidentified and no entries feature misspellings.
Sources	Minimum source requirements: more than 1 primary source, or more than 4 secondary sources used. All secondary sources published since 1985, most sources from scholarly books or peer-reviewed journals. Mixed use of both book and journal sources.