**European Tragedy assignment 1:**

**Further guidelines on writing a reflective commentary**

The instructions for the assignment include a set of initial questions to guide your preparation for the reflective commentary, as well as advice on bibliography. In what follows I provide additional guidance, organized according to the School’s standard assessment criteria for essays and similar work.

*1. Follows assignment brief*

This typically means:

1. Answering all the issues raised by the question/task, in the space available
2. Showing that you understand the terms and concepts that relate to the task
3. Ensuring that your work is squarely focused on the task, and avoiding irrelevance
4. Respecting the word limit (up to 10% over the total word limit is permissible. This includes footnotes and quotations, but *excludes the bibliography*)

Particular issues to consider for a reflective commentary:

* In relation to c) above: make sure that you comment on *your* decisions, and avoid giving a general account of Aristotle’s concepts and other perspectives on tragedy. You should certainly use material of that kind, but keep it subordinate to your reflections.

*2. Knowledge/understanding*

This typically means:

1. Good understanding of the material. Not mentioning facts or quoting sources for their own sake, but taking account of them *in a way that supports your analysis*
2. Also often important to show understanding of the wider subject area:

* Contexts of different kinds, e.g. tragedy as a genre
* Critical or theoretical perspectives, i.e. what people have already written about a topic
* Keep things relevant to the task: wider issues should *contribute* to your argument, *not take it over*

Particular issues to consider for a reflective commentary:

* Understanding Aristotelian principles: course materials, and Heath’s introduction to his translation of the *Poetics*, should be helpful in this respect
* Understanding the source material: you may well want to change some of the ‘facts’, but you need to be familiar with them before you do so, and to explain your decisions accordingly

*3. Argument/ analysis*

This typically means:

1. A line of argument that takes the reader clearly from the start to the finish of your discussion, while making sure that every point you make is supported with evidence

* Depending on your subject, evidence may take different forms: quotations, references, etc. Make clear how your evidence supports your point – evidence can’t speak for itself

1. Analysis means *interpreting* evidence, not just presenting it

* Where appropriate, your interpretations can draw on arguments presented in the secondary literature. But don’t feel obliged to *agree* with them – you may be able to develop a different perspective that is supported by argument and evidence

Particular issues to consider for a reflective commentary:

* ‘I thought…’ or (worse) ‘I felt…’ aren’t adequate justifications for your approach. Contrast:
  + ‘I invented a confrontation between characters X and Y because I thought it would be memorable’
  + ‘I invented a confrontation between characters X and Y to reveal aspects of their shared history, hence intensifying effects of pity and fear by underlining the closeness of the ties that are now threatened’

*4. Structure and organisation*

* For assignment 1, this is primarily relevant to your reflective commentary
* But the organisation of your tragic plot is also crucial. You will need to answer questions such as: where have you chosen to begin and end the events represented on stage? What offstage action may need to be reported, and how?
* *Introductions and conclusions are needed in a reflective commentary as well as a traditional essay*

*Introduction*: some do’s and don’t’s for this exercise:

* *Briefly* introduce your chosen protagonist, explain why they are a suitable subject for tragedy, and describe their real-life downfall
* Indicate *and justify* your priorities in creating a tragic plot
* Signpost the structure of your commentary, i.e. how you will deal with each priority/issue, and in what order (you could also signal which Aristotelian concepts will receive particular attention)
* *Don’t* use the introduction to present Aristotle’s ideas – a waste of space
* *Don’t* set out your findings in your introduction. That’s what your conclusion is for

*Main body*:

* Commenting on your plot summary in linear fashion is *very unlikely* to be a good use of space. Organize your main body by *topics*
* Your topic-based organisation should reflect whichever priorities you think are most important, with one topic per paragraph
* A possible approach would be to use a paragraph for each key concept: *ethos*, *dianoia*, *hamartia*, *peripeteia*, etc. Bear in mind, however, that important aspects of your plot may not correspond to these concepts – feel free to use whatever range of topics reflects your major decisions
* Link your paragraphs clearly – the order of your points should be coherent, not random. Classic signposting words will help (e.g. firstly, secondly, finally; on the one hand, on the other; in contrast; etc)

*Conclusion*: for this exercise, try to focus on:

* Outlining your findings *briefly* – a conclusion should be more than a summary
* What the challenges were in creating a tragic plot; any solutions you consider to have been particularly effective (and why)
* What you have learned about Aristotle’s concepts, and about tragedy in general, through the exercise

*5. Written English*

A reflective commentaryshould be in a formal academic register, i.e.:

* 100% accurate in basic details of spelling and punctuation (inc. any foreign words in quotations – *don’t rely on automatic spell-checking*)
* Coherent sentences: subject and verb must agree; there should be no missing words; quotations should fit coherently into the sentence structure
* Appropriate register:
  + *never* use contractions
  + *never* use the second person
  + avoid words and phrases that are not considered suitable for academic writing, e.g. ‘big’, ‘a lot of’, the verb ‘get’
* Concision is important: avoid needlessly wordy phrases (e.g. ‘due to the fact that’)

*6. Referencing*

* See the guidance and link at the end of the assignment instructions
* NB *lecture slides count as secondary sources*, and should be properly referenced. Within Cite Them Right Online, the necessary guidance can be accessed via ‘Choose Your Referencing Style’ > ‘Harvard’ > ‘Digital and Internet’ > ‘Learning Environments and Online Support’ > ‘Tutors’ lecture notes in VLEs’
* Your bibliography should be under a separate heading (but not necessarily on a separate page) at the end of your submission. Divide into *primary sources* and *secondary sources*; list entries with the author’s surname first, in alphabetical order of surname

*7. Presentation*

These issues apply to all elements of an assignment: plot summary, reflective commentary, and bibliography

* Pages should be numbered
* Text should have *at least* 1.5-line spacing throughout, *including* notes and bibliography
* Use a single font throughout, in at least 11 pt
* Use *italics* for book or play titles, but *single inverted commas* for titles of journal articles or book chapters
* Quotations should be presented in single inverted commas, without italics. If longer than two lines, a quotation should form a separate paragraph inset from the left-hand margin (*not centred*), without inverted commas but with an additional line space above and below