Writing about Literature
Tips for Success
TIP #1: READ, REREAD, AND ANNOTATE!

- See in particular *A Writer’s Reference*, L1 tab, for examples on how to read actively.

- Take notes throughout the story or poem!
- Ask questions—who, what, where, why, when, how?
- What are the themes, and how are those themes expressed in the literature?
TIP #2: USE DIRECT QUOTES!

- See *A Writer’s Reference*, L3-b and L5A

- Avoid retelling or summarizing the entire story or poem

- Only give enough context as it relates to your interpretation, and include direct quotations.
TIP #3: DON’T CONFUSE THE AUTHOR AND NARRATOR!

- Who wrote the literature (the creator)?
  - Author/Writer
- Who is telling the story?
  - Narrator(s)
- Who is speaking (or narrating) the poem?
  - Speaker
- Who are the main characters?
  - Think: Actions, Attitudes, Appearance
The first paragraph introduces the author by **full name**, followed by **title** of the literary work.

Examples:

- In John Updike’s short story, “A & P,” Sammy is distracted by three girls who walk into the grocery store where he works as a cashier.

- In Suzanne Collins’ novel, *The Hunger Games*, young Katniss Everdeen resists the unfair conditions that “The Capitol” imposes on her district.

- Langston Hughes, in his poem “Mother to Son,” creates a speaker who is warning her child about life’s struggles.
TIP #5: REFER TO THE AUTHOR APPROPRIATELY!

After fully introducing author and work title, use **author’s last name** only.

- **FIRST MENTION:** In **Suzanne Collins’** novel, *The Hunger Games*, young Katniss Everdeen resists the unfair conditions that the “The Capitol” imposes on her district.

- **SUBSEQUENT MENTION:** **Collins suggests** that a government’s thirst for power affects citizens of all ages and genders by creating the teenaged female protagonist, Katniss Everdeen.
TIP #6: USE THE PRESENT TENSE!

Examples:

- Miss Emily **demands** poison from the druggist, who **is** too afraid to deny her request.

- Lengel **advises** Sammy not to quit his job.

- See *A Writer’s Reference*, **L4**-**b**, for more examples of consistent tenses
EXERCISE: TRY TO IDENTIFY THE PRESENT TENSE VERBS

- In Suzanne Collins’ novel, *The Hunger Games*, young Katniss Everdeen resists the unfair conditions that “The Capitol” imposes on her district.

- In John Updike’s short story, “A & P,” Sammy is distracted by three girls who walk into the grocery store where he works as a cashier.

- Langston Hughes, in his poem “Mother to Son,” creates a speaker who is warning her child about life’s struggles.
TIP #7: INCLUDE A COMPLETE WORKS CITED PAGE!

- See A Writer’s Reference, MLA tab

Work Cited

TIP #8: DON’T FORGET ABOUT ALL THE AVAILABLE RESOURCES!

- **Print Resources:**
  - A Writer’s Reference, MLA tab and L tab
  - Your literature textbook
  - MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers

- **Online Resources:**
  - Melbourne Writing Center LibGuides
    - MLA Tab, MLA Basics, and Literary Journal Article Citation Guide