To receive an excellent grade, a student must demonstrate a reasonable competence in organizing an essay on a set topic; developing ideas logically and systematically; supporting these ideas with the necessary evidence, quotations or examples; organizing a paragraph; documenting essays (using MLA, APA, or Turabian) style; spelling the commoner words of the English language correctly; punctuating correctly; and writing grammatical sentences, avoiding such common mistakes as comma splices, run-on sentences, sentence fragments, faulty agreements, faulty references, shifts in person, number, or tense.

1. Choose any **ONE** of the works/authors of the Age of Reason/Revolutionary period studied in this course and write a literary analysis of the chosen work. The focus of the essay should be three-fold: to discuss the theme of the author/work, the major characteristics of the period that are evident in the work, and major narrative devices the author uses to communicate his or her message. Your essay must have a clearly-defined thesis statement, well-developed paragraph(s), and fitting conclusion.
2. The Puritan intellectual and spiritual energies were so decisive in laying down the patterns of American intellectual and spiritual (Christian) life. Though Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin make clear their belief in God, discuss how their writing, ideas, and beliefs depart from the firmly established Puritan/Christian beliefs?
3. Contemporary poet June Jordan calls Wheatley "Phillis Miracle." Why is her achievement(s) considered a "miracle"? How did this "miracle" affect the thinking and assumptions at the time and even contributed to the abolition of slavery?
4. Compare Phillis Wheatley with Anne Bradstreet.

Choose **ONE** of the following topics and write a polished essay of about 750 words (3-4 double spaced typed pages). The essay requires not less than 2 secondary sources. Before writing your essay, reread your notes and assigned textbook reading(s) just to refresh your memory. Also, it might be useful to reread a composition textbook to remind yourself of the guidelines on how to write a clearly-defined thesis statement, well-developed paragraph(s), and an essay using the MLA or APA or Turabian parenthetical method of documentation for your quotations and any secondary sources you cite. To let your instructor know which style of documentation you are using, write MLA, APA, or Turabian in the title of your essay as follows: **Title – Citation style** (e.g., “Christians and the Study of American Literature – APA”).

**Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784): First African American Writer/Poet to Publish a Book**

Reputation: "The best poet of the period" (Martin Day, *A Handbook of American Literature* 21)

Phillis Wheatley is a notable poet/writer who wrote patriotic poems to George Washington during the revolutionary period.

**Biography**

* Brought to America at about Age 7
* Bought by John and Susanna Wheatley
* Read Bible and English and Latin literature, history, and geography
* Began to write English poetry after 4 years exposure to English Language
* 1767: Published first poem in Rhode Island Newspaper
* 1770: Earned fame with an elegy on the death of Rev. George Whitefield
* 1773: Sailed to England to publish the 1st volume of her poetry; was received by Benjamin Franklin
* 1773: Returned to Boston due to Susanna’s serious illness
* 1773: Was emancipated 20 years old
* 1775: Undertook patriotic poetry by writing to Washington
* 1776: Visited Washington
* 1778: Married John Peters, a freed slave
* 1784: Death.

Works: Authored *POEMS ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS, RELIGION AND MORAL BY PHILLIS WHEATLEY, NEGRO SERVANT.*

**Subject matter ranges from:**

1. Wheatley's devout Christianity
2. Puritan beliefs/influence
3. Interest in spiritual freedom rather than freedom from slavery. See "On Being Brought from Africa"
4. Celebration of her spiritual salvation
5. Expression of grief: the death of Reverend George Whitefield
6. Patriotism and allegiance to American Independence; see "To His Excellency General Washington."
7. Neo-Classical themes & style
8. Weighty life-and-death matters
9. Interest in current events and in poetry that addressed prominent people

Contemporary poet June Jordan calls Wheatley "Phillis Miracle." Why is her achievement(s) considered a "miracle"? How did this "miracle" affect the thinking and assumptions at the time and even contributed to the abolition of slavery?

1. Unprecedented
* African-born slave-woman-servant writing poems on "serious matters" in English, her adopted language? How possible?

**Note** use and effect of authenticating introductory/prefatory materials (not included in Anthology) by:

1. John Wheatley, her master and a respected Boston merchant
2. Most respectable Characters in Boston, including His Excellency Thomas Hutchinson, Governor, 1771-74.
3. Challenged and reversed prejudices (on its title page alone)
4. Constituted indisputable proof of genius

**Concluding Thoughts and Questions**

What factors contributed to Wheatley's success as a poet/writer

1. Education: grew up in a fixed and prejudged position in then society, but with a stroke of a pen, she became a poet and gained prominence and upward social mobility. In a sense, she started African American literature.
2. Salvific message of her poetry—interested in spiritual redemption, in God’s goodness as opposed to His wrath, and in notion that salvation is the most important thing in life

Compare Wheatley with Bradstreet. Does anything in Wheatley's poetry indicate that she was a woman?

* Both document important events in their poetry
* Their works have great variety (historical, domestic, and religious)
* Both show evidence of learning
* Provide hope for the future—a delightful subject to Christians
* Wheatley adopts a public voice, whereas Bradstreet’s voice is personal/private. She did not intend to be published

Wheatley resembles the earlier colonial writers (such as Wigglesworth and Taylor) for whom personal concerns and personal voice are largely absent. What explains the absence of personal voice in Wheatley and these early colonial writers? (Consider the following: artistic detachment and projection of self away from individual to universal—to one communicating a message—often religious--to the public).

Thomas Jefferson, in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, states: "religion indeed has produced a Phillis Wheatley; but it could not produce a poet"; however, Washington, after receiving the poem "To His Excellency General Washington," described Wheatley's poetry as "elegant lines . . . the style and manner exhibit a striking proof of … poetical talents…." What, in your opinion, explains the two leaders' different perception of Wheatley's poetry?