Craig McConnell’s One Page Checklist
for Academic Writing Assignments

☐ **Thesis**
  You should be able to identify a clear statement of an original idea that you support with the rest of your essay.

☐ **References**
  ☐ Every idea in your essay that is not your own should be clearly credited to the original author.
  ☐ Every quotation should be in quotation marks (“”) and properly cited. The page number where the quotation was found should be indicated.

☐ **Style**
  ☐ Avoid the following cliché (and usually overly general) introductions:
    - Since the dawn of time . . .
    - Since the beginning of civilization . . .
  ☐ Do not use rhetorical questions.
  ☐ Do not use the following phrases:
    - Everyone knows that . . .
    - It is generally understood that . . .
    - In my opinion . . .
    - It seems to me that . . .
    - As a Christian, I believe . . .
    - According to Webster’s Dictionary, . . .
  ☐ It is generally a bad idea to quote a dictionary definition. (It is reasonable to do this if you are discussing the evolution of the meaning of a word – in this case, consult the *Oxford English Dictionary* or another appropriate scholarly dictionary).
  ☐ “Titles of Short Stories, Articles, and Other Short Works in Quotation Marks”
  *Titles of Novels, Books, Plays, Films, and Other Long Works Italicized*
  ☐ Follow the advice of Strunk and White: “Omit Needless Words”.
    - (Example: replace “. . . due to the fact that . . .” with “. . . because . . .”)
  ☐ Read your essay out loud – it should sound natural and smooth.

☐ **Grammar**
  Please check for the following common errors:
  ☐ “It’s” is a contraction for “it is”; “its” is a possessive.
  ☐ “Their” is possessive; “there” is a place; “they’re” is a contraction for “they are”.
  ☐ The past tense of “lead” is “led” (even though the past tense of “read” is “read”).
  ☐ “Who” is a subjective pronoun; “whom” is an objective pronoun:
    - “The man who was married.”
    - “The girl to whom he was married.”
  ☐ It is never “people which” or “people that” – it is always “people who”.
  ☐ **Know your own grammar foibles and check for them closely.**

☐ **Formatting**
  ☐ Number the pages.
  ☐ Title your essay.
  ☐ All essays should be double spaced, one-inch margins all around, in a reasonable font (like the one on this page – Times New Roman 12).
  ☐ Make sure that the first line of a paragraph doesn’t get stranded at the bottom of a page; make sure that the last line of a paragraph doesn’t get bumped to the top of the next page (that is, enable “Widow/Orphan Protect” in your word processor).
  ☐ Always spell check before printing.
  ☐ One staple in the upper left corner is plenty – please don’t use report covers.