

Mr. Francis  
E4-EL

### Wilde's Epigrammatic Wit

An epigram is "a terse, sage, or witty and often paradoxical saying" ("Epigram"). Epigrammatic lines abound in Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest (1895). These often intensely quotable lines might seem shallow, hollow, or downright ridiculous at first. But after further consideration, the wit and wisdom of Wilde becomes apparent.

The paradoxes of Wilde's epigrams often stem from the author's sometime devotion to the tenet of Aestheticism that "life should imitate art." That which at face value sounds false reveals to the audience a provocative truth; that which the average polite individual might feel reluctant even to whisper becomes acceptable for the aesthete to utter loudly and seemingly without caution.

Choose one especially epigrammatic line from Oscar Wilde's The Importance of Being Earnest (1895). Formulate a strong and compelling thesis that considers the truth and falsehood involved in the line, especially as reflected in the characters and action of the play.

All text and ideas borrowed from outside sources must be cited parenthetically using correct MLA style. Include a works cited list immediately following your essay. This works cited list must include the correct edition of the play and all outside sources. Please use correct MLA style.

Please use standard MLA format. The essay must be double-spaced, with one-inch margins all around. Please use a 12-point, Times New Roman font. All papers must have an appropriate and creative title. Length guideline: 2-3 pages. No coversheets.

You will be expected to submit a one-page proposal that clearly identifies your epigrammatic line, its speaker, and its context in the play. Identify at least one sense in which the statement rings false and at least one way in which Aestheticism makes it ring true.

You must complete a full rough draft to be peer edited in class. The rough draft should be no fewer than four paragraphs in length. The proposal and your peer-edited rough draft should be submitted—stapled separately—with your final draft.

### Work Cited

"Epigram." Def. 2. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. 10th ed. 1996.