Characteristics of a Shakespearean Tragic Hero

1. He must be a person of some stature or high position such as a king, general, or nobleman.

2. He must be basically a good person. He must matter to us and we must see him as a worthwhile person.

3. Because of his position, his actions usually have far-reaching effects.

4. He must possess a character trait or quality which under normal circumstances would be a virtue, but which under the special circumstances of the play proves to be a fatal flaw.

5. Although a great man, he often shows promise of further greatness.

6. Frequently, he makes serious errors in judgement which lead him to committing the deed which begins his downfall.

7. He must be ultimately responsible for the deed which begins his downfall.

8. He usually makes further errors in judgement following his misdeed.

9. Often he has a distorted perception of, or is blind to, reality.

10. He frequently commits further crimes which precipitate his downfall.

11. He suffers both outwardly (isolation, alienation, attacks) and inwardly (tortured conscience).

12. He must elicit both pity and fear from the audience (catharsis).

13. Usually he recognizes his mistakes.

14. He must die