

## Research Paper

Due Dates: Monday, 29 November, in class.

Length: 5–7 typed pages

### Assignment:

In this paper you will analyze one notable aspect of a single text assigned for class reading. I want you to explain why you think that aspect is significant, and why an understanding of that aspect is crucial to an appreciation of the text. You might, for example, discuss the importance of a particular *scene*, or the recurrence of certain clusters of images, or the repetition or variation of a theme, or the significance of the text's form (such as a poem's meter, rhyme scheme, stanzas), or the impression you receive of the text's speaker, or the structure you find as the text unfolds. Your paper should focus on *one* element that you think contributes to the overall meaning or success of the text. Consult and incorporate secondary sources (i.e. articles and books which contain scholarly interpretations of the story, and possibly even statements by the author) which discuss that aspect, but always keep in mind that I am mostly interested in your thesis, your ideas and your interpretation. Be sure to avoid a mere plot summary, and to provide textual examples to illustrate your points. I am more impressed by a careful analysis of those examples, however, than by papers which simply list quotations and assume their meaning is self-evident.

Concentrate on details: you must quote portions of the text to show how it supports your thesis. Make sure you also explain, however, *how* that quotation illustrates your thesis, and *why* the quotation means what you claim it does. Then offer comments that show how the portion you're interpreting contributes to the work as a whole. As a general rule, "say more about less": limit your focus to a small enough topic so that you can cover it in some detail.

Underline or italicize the titles of books, novels and plays; put the titles of articles, short stories and poems in quotation marks; for poems which do not have a title, you may refer to the first line as if it were the title. When quoting poetry, use slashes to indicate the end of lines; for example, "Break, break, break, / On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!" (ll. 1-2). When quoting four or more lines of verse, indent the quotation and omit the slashes and the quotation marks:

Break, break, break,  
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!  
And I would that my tongue could utter  
The thoughts that arise in me. (ll. 1-4)

As in the examples above, provide line numbers in the parenthetical citations for poems, not page numbers.

1) Limit your focus. Choose a small enough topic so that you can cover it in detail. You need to pick an aspect that is brief enough to allow you to analyze both it and critical remarks about it in a 5–7 page paper.

2) Defend your thesis. It is not enough merely to state a generalization about the selected aspect. You must also back up your claim with detailed, specific evidence (such as quotations from the text, or a statement by a critic who agrees with your reading); for your paper to be truly convincing, you should go even further and explain why the evidence supports your point.

3) Use a variety of sources. Don't base your interpretation on a single critic and book; instead, try to incorporate both recent and older materials, and books and articles which both agree with and differ from your thesis. There are plenty of critics writing about these authors, so spend some time researching them.

4) Document all outside sources. Whenever you quote, paraphrase or summarize either the text or a critic, you must supply a parenthetical citation providing the author's name and the page number(s). For web pages, however, which do not have page numbers, you should give only the author's name. If you have several consecutive sentences paraphrasing one particular source, you must either provide a citation for each sentence or (preferably) attribute the passages to the author, and cite the page number after the last sentence. [For example: "M. H. Smith disagrees with that reading, and asserts that we should read *Wuthering Heights* as a dramatic monologue. He goes on to argue that Brontë was more a Modern than a Victorian novelist" (33-35).] Finally, you must include a Works Cited page, which identifies the primary text and the critics you cite in your essay. Use the MLA format for all documentation. Remember that failing to give proper credit for the words or ideas of another constitutes plagiarism, a serious violation of Mercer's Honor Code.

Make sure you have thought about the paper *before* you begin writing it, and strive to communicate your ideas in the clearest possible language. I will be happy to discuss this paper with you before you turn it in; in fact, I would advise it.

This paper is due in class. I will penalize late papers by one letter grade per day. Please see me if it appears your paper will not be finished on time.