

SOME GUIDELINES FOR WRITING PAPERS

1. The purpose of the papers assigned in this subject is analytical. I want to allow you to exercise your own critical judgment by formulating a critical argument and then by pointing out and discussing specific textual evidence which supports your argument. Summary or paraphrase and unanalytic description ("this is a sonnet, and uses essses a great deal. To which I mutter in reply, "So what?" Or, rather, "To what effect?") are not an acceptable part of such a paper.
2. A critical argument consists most significantly of an assertion of what seems to you to be the point made by the text under analysis, and then of answers to the question **why**: why has the author included a particular character or metaphor or word or formal device? In what ways does this specific element or moment serve to present, complicate, or elaborate the "argument" which the work itself presents about human life or human nature? Many of the best critical arguments seem, at first, a little odd; all critical arguments demand that the critic take a stand and defend that stand **from within the work being analyzed** (not, in other words, solely or primarily by way of the assertion of "truths" derived from some undefined body of wisdom).
3. Papers should be economical; avoid elaborate and general beginnings, and be sure to include points and evidence only if they are relevant to **your** essay.
4. Secondary works (books or articles about the author or her work; including the introductory essays in the anthology or elsewhere) can be useful but, in this subject, should be avoided. Even the introductions included in the assigned texts are of little value for our purposes, and should be approached very warily. If you do for some reason use a source of information other than the work itself, you must carefully and openly identify the source and your use of it, by way of footnotes if possible. **FAILURE TO DO THIS IS ABOUT AS SERIOUS A SIN AS CAN BE IMAGINED, IN AN ACADEMIC CONTEXT.**
5. Of course it is expected that the work in the paper you turn in is your own. Any paper which presents as your work language or ideas which in fact belong to someone else is unforgivably flawed. It is always better to write a bad paper of your own than to "borrow" a good paper. **ALWAYS.**
6. Papers should be typed or word-processed, on standard sized (8 1/2 by 11) paper. Margins should be about 1 inch all around. A "page" is about 250 words. Papers should be proofread for spelling and grammatical errors.
7. You need not use footnotes to identify the location of references or quotations **IF YOU ARE CITING THE TEXT ASSIGNED IN CLASS.** But you should "locate" the references you make, using parentheses and line numbers.
8. The Writing Center can be of great help with mechanics, grammar, organization -- the messy details. They won't write the essay for you, but if you drop in they will help you

edit, revise, and improve what you've already written or thought.

Some Criteria for a Good Paper

1. Does your essay clearly and precisely define a fundamental human question which the text you are writing about addresses? Does your essay go on to demonstrate what position -- or positions -- the text takes on this issue?
2. Does your introduction clearly and articulately identify those aspects of the text you plan to write about? Have you carefully selected those aspects which most directly and complexly address the issue you identified in step 1?
3. Does your essay proceed to do what you said you were going to do, in a well-organized and connected manner? Have you arranged your separate points in a clear and coherent pattern or form?
4. Is your paper -- to the best of your ability -- grammatically correct? Are the words spelled correctly? Not to be picky -- grammatical and typographical errors can radically reduce the cogency and persuasiveness of an essay.
5. Have you supported your arguments by specifically referring to the text? Have you avoided the tendency to propose vast generalizations? If you refer to works or to people's ideas other than those explicitly contained in the text, have you clearly identified your sources?
6. Does your essay have an effective conclusion? This should be not just a summary of what you've said but a final articulation of what you hope your reader has learned from reading your essay -- a final proof of the value of your whole line of inquiry.
7. Have you clearly "located" any quotations you draw from the text -- using parentheses and page numbers (if it's a story or essay you are writing about, and if you are using the edition listed on the syllabus), or parentheses and line numbers (if you are writing about a poem)?