

Exercise: motive

Due Monday, February 24, at 10 p.m. on Canvas.

To help develop your first paper, choose a topic, then write a short paragraph (no more than 150 words) that formulates a **motive** for analysis and explains it through a **specific textual example** which you cite and discuss. Conclude your paragraph by stating, as clearly as you can, what the central problem or question of your paper will be. Think of this as a draft of (most of) an introduction. Here is an example based on our class discussion on Conan Doyle:

Conan Doyle's "A Scandal in Bohemia" is set up as a battle of the sexes. Sherlock Holmes, Watson, and the King of Bohemia confront the wily Irene Adler and attempt to retrieve a compromising photograph from her. Much of the story emphasizes the starkness of gender difference, contrasting the physical exertions of the masculine hero with the sweetness and sly cleverness of his antagonist. Yet "Scandal" insistentlly undermines predictable sex roles, most notably when Irene dons masculine disguise: "Male costume is nothing new to me," she writes in her final letter (27). Not only does Irene fool Sherlock, but this cross-dressing routine is "nothing new." This paper interprets the unexpected challenge to fixed gender roles in "Scandal."

This paragraph establishes an interpretive **problem** by highlighting an apparent tension in the story; it cites an example to explain the problem, and it says what the paper is going to try to do. A complete essay would have to take the next step and propose a thesis that says what the interpretation actually is. But the purpose of this exercise is to spend some time figuring out what an interesting question would be.

Please waste no words on generalizing filler ("Sir Athur Conan Doyle was the author of the popular Sherlock Holmes stories about a detective who solved many mysteries with his friend Dr. John Watson...").

You may also consider incorporating your response to one of our three readings on genre (Frow, Moretti, and Todorov). This is not strictly required, but good academic motives often come by responding to someone else's generalization.

The response must be meaningful—a critique, an unexpected extension, or a refinement.

Please review the paper guidelines. From the paper assignment:

Your paper must address a significant, interesting, non-obvious question about one of the texts, and it must propose a clearly articulated, non-simplistic answer to that question. The question does not have to be a literal question; but successful papers always have a focused *motive* for the particular analysis they carry out. Think about how your *highly specific* claims connect to broader questions about the genre of crime fiction or the themes your paper discusses, and how following your interpretation changes how readers should think about these questions. In order to find a motive in this sort of single-text assignment, think about what is most surprising about what you have to say. You may take for granted that your reader has in mind what has been discussed in class.

You are not required to actually write the paper you begin work on for this exercise! If you wish to change topics or texts, you may.

GRADING

The exercise will be graded generously out of 4.0. Late exercises can only be accepted up until two days before the paper deadline, and will receive no more than half credit.

A successful exercise identifies a text and a topic, appropriately cites an example, and identifies an interpretive problem that can be addressed in a short paper about the text.

OBLIGATORY “AI” REMARK

It would be dishonest to pass off something from the output of a Large Language Model (including Grammarly, Gemini, etc.) as your own work. Also, LLMs have no concept of scholarly relevance and remain extremely bad at incorporating specific textual evidence; if you ask ChatGPT for more quotes, it usually makes them up. Exercises with fabricated examples, however produced, will receive no credit.