

First Paper Assignment

DUE THURSDAY, OCTOBER 16, AT 10 PM ON CANVAS

Write a focused, analytic paper making an argument about a specific problem, device, or pattern in one of our readings: “The Figure in the Carpet,” *Portrait of the Artist*, “Vasantica,” “When Is a Woman,” “Love in a Penthouse,” “Lady, Your Pardon,” or *To the Lighthouse*. Though your paper should focus on one text, you make make brief reference to our other readings where it helps your argument. Demonstrate your claims by analyzing specific textual evidence.

No outside research is expected or required. Your paper should be your own work, developed through careful reflection on the readings and the class discussion. Your paper should be 1800–2400 words in length; longer papers are usually acceptable, but significantly shorter papers cannot earn a satisfactory grade.

SUGGESTED TOPICS

You may formulate your own highly focused topic or adapt one of the following:

Minor role. Write a paper about a recurring minor character in *Portrait* or *To the Lighthouse* (a figure who occupies only a small textual space and appears more than once), developing an argument for the *unexpected* significance of that figure. What role does this character play in the structure and meaning of the text? How does this character work to point out particular themes? Why is the character represented only briefly, and what are the implications of this brevity for what is and is not represented? What explains the minor figure’s recurrence? Some possibilities in Joyce: Mrs. Dedalus, Emma, Heron, Father Arnall.

Writing the mind. Develop an argument about the representation of some aspect of mental life in one of our texts: for example, memory, daydream, or “mindreading” (i.e. figuring out what someone else is thinking). Show how the writer uses linguistic conventions in representing mental processes, and consider what the significance of those conventions might be. In particular, your analysis should certainly take into account the mechanics of quotation and free indirect discourse, situating these and other techniques in relation to your own interpretation.

Horizons of expectation. Focusing on one of the assigned love stories, develop an argument about the interplay between the expected and the surprising in terms of genre *and* in terms of social convention. Your analysis should specify precisely how expectations are created and then fulfilled or violated. Happy endings are just the beginning here: consider norms of proper and improper courtship, suitable and unsuitable mates, timelines of maturity and marriage, the relation be-

tween sex and property, the use of *masculine* perspective, the question of family, or the question of career.

Same-gender relations. Choosing one of our texts, develop an argument about that text's representation of same-gender characters' relationships and desires. Remember that desires cannot always be clearly categorized as sexual or not. If there is more than one homosocial relation of interest, use a comparison among pairings to sharpen your claims about the novel's representation of such relationships. Pay special attention to the distinction between what is explicit and what is suggested, what is socially legitimate and what is illicit—and how you know. Bad papers on this topic are characterized by generalizations, complacent assumptions that the past was repressed and we are now free, or “outing” gestures (“X is actually gay”): instead, develop your subtlest detailed analysis of particular cases.

Composition of place. Develop an argument about the meaning of particular kinds of setting in one of our texts, explaining the significance of environments or of movement through space. To be effective, an interpretation of setting has to show that setting itself matters to the themes: it is not enough to say that certain plot events happen somewhere. You might focus on city streets, for example; or on spaces of privacy and confinement; or on the way the novel compares locations; or on the difference between lived-in spaces and imagined ones.

Representing the “modern” woman. Develop an argument about how one of our texts responds to shifting social roles and norms for women. Because you are not expected to do historical research, you must show how particular moments or aspects of the text themselves suggest that some ways of being a woman are new and progressive or backwards and regressive. You may also consider drawing on paratextual materials like illustrations and advertisements. Avoid making assumptions or snap judgments about women “back then”; read closely for what is actually being imagined, contested, or dismissed in the text, and interpret the patterns you can demonstrate.

WRITING GUIDELINES

Careful analysis of textual evidence is central to this paper. We have been modeling this mode of analysis in class. Your claims should be supported by extensive *quotation*. To support a claim, it is not enough simply to quote; once you quote, you must *analyze* what you have quoted, paying close attention to the significance of individual words, of syntactical and rhetorical patterns, of nuances and implications. Instead of attempting to paraphrase what a text means or summarize what it's about, *show how it works*. Do not take for granted that your reader will see the

text the way you do: point out the details that can convince the reader of what you say. Every analytical claim you make should be supported by concrete evidence from the text; every part of your paper should make substantive analytical claims.

Your paper must address a significant, interesting, non-obvious interpretive question about one of the texts, and it must propose a clearly articulated, non-simplistic answer to that question. The suggested topics give some hints about interesting questions. Successful papers always have a strong, focused *motive* for the particular analysis they carry out. Think about how your *highly specific* claims connect to broader questions about the author, genre, or theme 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. (That also means that you should not repeat material from class too much.)

Motive is often established at the start of an essay. *Avoid writing a generalizing introduction.* Begin your essay with a surprising piece of evidence or observation of your own that immediately frames the topic you are going to address and establishes its interest. Then move from motive to argument: expanding on that initial piece of evidence, forecast the terms of your argument, then state the central, argumentative claim of the essay.

Your argument should answer your motivating question. That does not mean that every good paper resolves every problem it poses; on the contrary, good papers attend to the complexities of their subject matter. But an effective argument means your reader learns something from your analysis of your evidence. It will help to ask yourself what alternative arguments someone might make about your topic and to anticipate objections to your claims.

Think carefully about the *line of thought* of your writing, the way one claim leads to the next. “Transition sentences” are less important than your sense of the overall logic of your argument: think of the essay as a story you have to tell about the text you are analyzing, one with an arc from beginning to end. One of the most compelling ways to tell such a story is by thinking carefully about the *order of presentation of evidence*: indeed, you can “outline” a paper by first choosing the five or six passages that are most essential to your thinking and then deciding what sequence they should be presented in. The best sequence is rarely the sequence of the text itself; don’t start at the beginning and end at the end of your text. Choose an order that makes your point.

DRAFTS

Plan to draft and revise. You may send either of us partial or full drafts for brief comments, as long as you do so at least three days before the deadline. I will answer questions, time permitting, up through the day before the deadline.

FORMAT

Your paper should have 1.5-inch left and right margins, with text in twelve-point serif font (e.g.: Garamond, Hoefler Text, Palatino, Baskerville, or, less appealingly, Cambria, Times), and between single and one-and-a-half spacing. *Number all pages.* The paper should have your name and the date on the first page. Give your paper a meaningful title.

Submit your paper electronically via the Canvas Assignments tool. E-mail submissions are not acceptable. If you wish to turn in your paper in hard copy, please contact me in advance.

Digital submissions should be in Portable Document Format (PDF) if possible. Native word-processor formats (.doc, .docx, .pages, .odt) are acceptable. All word processors can produce PDF files, through a “Save As...” option, an “Export” command, or a “Print to PDF” option in the print dialog.

STYLE

You must proofread carefully.

Quotations should be carefully transcribed, punctuated, and attributed. In a paper on a single text, you may give a full citation only once, either in an MLA-style “Work Cited” bibliography or in a Chicago-style footnote to the first quotation. After that, citations can consist of page numbers in parentheses. Secondary sources are not required in this paper; but if you use someone else’s work, including someone’s informal comments inside class or out, *you must cite that work*. Using someone else’s work without specific citation is plagiarism. Consistency and thoroughness in citation is more important than exact fidelity to either MLA or Chicago style.

Please follow the conventions of standard written American English. I am non-prescriptive about things like the split infinitive, the sentence-final preposition, and “they” used as a gender-neutral singular pronoun. The passive voice is an excellent grammatical resource and can be used freely, provided it is used wisely.

The best resource on matters of usage is the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary of English Usage*. For detailed information about current and past word uses, the fundamental source is the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

LATE POLICY

Late papers will be graded. If I receive your late paper less than 48 hours after the deadline, your maximum grade is 3.0. A paper that is more than 48 hours late can receive no higher than a 2.0. You may turn in a late paper any time until the last class meeting.

Computer problems are not a valid excuse for lateness. Plan ahead. Back up frequently.

GRADING

The syllabus explains the general meaning of marks on the four-point scale. The chief criteria of assessment are:

Evidence. Has textual evidence been used extensively, chosen well, and interpreted effectively in support of claims?

Motive. Does the paper make its central problem interesting?

Argument. Is the argument focused, logical, convincing, surprising?

Line of thought. Does the paper develop its ideas in connected, orderly fashion? Does the conclusion follow from (and differ from) the opening?

Style. Is the paper clearly written? Is it free from typographical, grammatical, and other errors?

IN GENERAL

An A-range (3.5–4.0) paper is strong by all these criteria; a B-range (2.5–3.5) paper has well-chosen, well-analyzed evidence but does not fully develop its argument or its motive; a C-range (1.5–2.5) paper lacks evidence or uses evidence only to summarize plot; and a D-range (0.5–1.5) paper is too short or ignores the assignment.

If you submit work that is not your own, you will not receive credit for the assignment, and you will face disciplinary consequences. Any part of your paper that is not by you must be correctly attributed to its source; misrepresenting work written by someone else or generated with an online aid (including “AI”) as your own is plagiarism. See the Rutgers academic integrity policy on the website academicintegrity.rutgers.edu.