

## The Research Paper

Research proposal due November 4 at 10 p.m. on Canvas

Presentations in class December 1–3

Paper due Wednesday, December 17 at 10 p.m. on Canvas

Research and write a paper of approximately 5000–6000 words (15–20 pp.) making an interpretive argument about a moment in the history of romance, science fiction, or crime fiction, including substantial discussion of primary sources beyond the syllabus, as well as consideration of primary and secondary sources from the syllabus. An in-class presentation on work in progress will be separately graded. Your argument must be focused, original, and supported by careful analysis of evidence. The requirement of addressing a *moment in genre history* means that your argument should situate its primary evidence in the history of your chosen genre in some way, by paying attention to (for example) precedents, innovations, alternative pathways, or conflicts in genre forms, themes, media, or audiences.

Your research must include a meaningful engagement with a substantial body of source material beyond the syllabus, including both primary and secondary sources. *Primary* sources are objects of analysis: for example, a novel, several short fictions, physical book objects, magazines with their ads and other paratexts, fan publications, reviews, convention programs, and so on. *Secondary* sources are scholarly articles, book chapters, or monographs that make arguments you engage with.

Your research paper must use some secondary sources, but my expectations for your secondary research depend on how much additional primary research you are doing. You are encouraged to use the assigned secondary sources from the syllabus where appropriate. You need not, of course, review the full literature on your subject. Engaging with secondary sources does not mean simply summarizing that work or quoting it in order to agree. Engagement means building on, complicating, or disputing the other scholar's salient claims. This can be done with something as small as a single footnote or as large as a several-paragraph section of your paper.

*Begin your research forthwith* so that you will have time to find and read all your sources. I will work with each of you to help you find interesting and worthwhile research materials, including primary and secondary sources. Within the paper itself you will have the task of *concisely* introducing your additional sources and analyzing them for your argument. In the end, however, the heart of the pa-

per will be your analysis of primary evidence.

Since we have been paying consistent attention to the material forms of text, please consider whether some of the materials held by the Rutgers Book Initiative might be useful. You saw a sampling in our session with Javiera and Mitchell. The collection holdings are listed at [sites.rutgers.edu/ru-book-initiative/teaching-collection](https://sites.rutgers.edu/ru-book-initiative/teaching-collection).

## REQUIRED WORK

### RESEARCH PROPOSAL DUE NOVEMBER 4

The proposal should briefly describe your research question and tentative thoughts about an argument, and list some of the sources you plan to work with.

Your topic can be described in a single paragraph. Explain the central question or problem you are interested in, situate it within the history of your chosen genre, and connect this question or problem to a specific observation or claim about *at least one* of our readings in the course.

Your preliminary bibliography should list all the primary sources you are planning to discuss in your paper, with full citations, and at least three scholarly secondary sources. You can complete this assignment before you have read much of your material: skim intelligently, refer to summaries and excerpts of texts you find online (especially in scholarly articles/book chapters you look at), and extrapolate.

You will not be committed to the topic or sources you describe, but it is important to begin your thinking and to do it in writing. Then I can respond with more guidance. If this exercise is not completed on time, I will deduct 0.2 points from the final paper grade (out of 4.0).

*Doing the research, November–December.* Though we will continue to read a few more texts together and discuss them in class, you are responsible for figuring out how to schedule your own research and writing while managing your other obligations. Make *realistic* plans to focus your attention on a *small number* of primary sources you will study carefully.

### PRESENTATION IN CLASS DECEMBER 1–3

Prepare a ten-minute talk on your research. Discuss the reading you have done for the paper, and present at least one substantial textual example within a coherent argumentative frame. Explain what you have discovered and how you will use it.

There will be a separate assignment sheet explaining the presentation expectations in more detail. Your presentation is separately graded, with the understanding that it is part of work in progress.

#### FINAL PAPER DUE DECEMBER 17

If you have an exam or another large paper deadline, I will consider a one or two-day extension, provided you contact me by December 1. If you do not have an extension, the maximum grade you can receive on a late paper is a 3.0.

#### WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT A TOPIC

Choosing a topic is part of the assignment. Here are some possible lines of exploration:

*An author.* Read more of a writer we have read together. Concentrate on some aspect of that writer's use of genre, paying attention to variation in their careers. Think about the way the writer is published (in shiny hardcovers? in pulp magazines?).

*A magazine.* Choose a genre magazine to learn more about, and plan a *reasonably-sized* investigation that you can carry out using materials readily available to you. Good general might topics include: ways of inventing, reinventing, or marketing a subgenre; readers responses and fan communities; genre-based prestige or dishonor.

The best digital sources for genre periodicals are the Internet Archive ([archive.org](http://archive.org), which is completely chaotic, and the more selective Pulp Magazines Project ([pulpmags.org](http://pulpmags.org)), together with the bafflingly huge bibliographies at Galactic Central ([philsp.com](http://philsp.com)). An astonishing body of science-fiction fanzies and convention programs is digitized at [fanac.org](http://fanac.org).

A paperback or hardcover publishing series might be studied in the same way, but your materials will be limited to what you can find in the Rutgers Libraries or the Book Initiative collection.

*A cross-section.* Think about a meaningful (but *small*) group of texts by different writers who exemplify something notable in genre history: the emergence of feminist SF, for example, or the "golden age" detective mystery. Writers like Horsley, Bordwell, and Luckhurst give many references to groups of writers (e.g. the *Black Mask* hard-boiled writers, the "chick dick" writers, etc.) which point to possible sources. As with any comparative topic, merely listing similarities and differences is insufficient for an argument; the goal is to uncover unexpected shared tendencies or divergences. (Here, too, referring to scholarship

supplies an important motive.)

## 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. Cover pages are wastes of imaginary paper.

Submit your paper electronically via the Canvas Assignments tool. E-mail submissions are not acceptable.

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.

## PROOFREAD

*You must proofread carefully.*

## CITATIONS

Quotations should be carefully transcribed, punctuated, and attributed. All sources must be documented appropriately; I recommend Chicago or MLA style. Waste no space: repeated citations to a single text need nothing more than a page number in parentheses. Consistency and thoroughness in citation is more important than exact fidelity to either MLA or Chicago style. Fairly brief guides to both styles are available on the Purdue OWL site: [owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/](http://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/).

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.

Using someone else’s work, even unknowingly, via the text-reprocessing systems known as “generative AI” is also academic dishonesty. ChatGPT, Google NotebookLM, and their ilk do not generate reliable quotations or citations (they “hallucinate”). I will consider any use of them on this paper a serious violation of academic integrity.

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*.

## GRADING

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

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

*Motive.* Does the paper make its central problem interesting? Does it situate its interpretation plausibly in the history of a genre? Does it participate cogently in an intellectual conversation with other scholars? Does it aim to show something unexpected—something that needs an analysis to be convincing?

*Argument.* Is the argument focused, logical, and convincing?

*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](http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu).