

## First Paper Assignment

PRELIMINARY EXERCISE DUE FRIDAY, OCTOBER 6, AT 10 P.M.

PAPER DUE LUCKY FRIDAY, OCTOBER 13, AT 10 P.M.

Write a paper making an argument about a significant *tension* or *contradiction* in one of our science-fiction readings assigned up through October 2. Your argument should be supported with extensive quotation and analysis of the language of the chosen text. Establish the relevance of your argument in relation to one of the recurring problems of the science-fiction genre discussed in the course so far; you should also refer pointedly, but minimally, to at least one of Suvin, Rieder, or Luckhurst.

Your paper should be 1600–2000 words in length; longer papers are usually acceptable, but significantly shorter papers cannot earn a satisfactory grade. Some general themes that might be the source of interesting tensions or contradictions in most of our texts:

- the relationship between macro and micro;
- the authority and appeal of science its relation to ordinary life;
- the norms of sexuality and gender;
- techniques for making the familiar strange and vice-versa;
- nature as a resource, as a threat, or as us.

PRELIMINARY EXERCISE DUE OCTOBER 6

Select a passage of text not discussed in class which seems to you to indicate a significant tension or contradiction in the story. Write 150–200 words in which you use the language of the text to analyze how the contradiction arises, and explain how it shapes the story.

This exercise will be graded for effort. You are encouraged to use it to try out an initial paper idea, but your paper is not required to be related to the exercise in any way.

### 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. Avoid summarizing the text; *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 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 science fiction that we have dwelt on in class, and think about how following your interpretation changes how readers should think about these questions. 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. Do not construct straw men (“everybody thinks...”); instead, cite what a scholar we have read actually claims and then build on or critique it in the context of your chosen story.

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 me 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. After a first citation of a text, there is usually no need to include more than a page number for subsequent citations. Consistency and thoroughness in citation is more important than exact fidelity to either MLA or Chicago style. 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.

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*, also available in a paperback Concise Edition. 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 day of classes.

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 (1.0–2.5) paper lacks evidence or uses evidence only to summarize plot; and a D-range (0.5–1.0) 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 <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>.