

Guidelines--Paper #2

- Paper is due by 3 p.m. on Friday, May 16 in my mailbox in the English Department mail room. A late paper will be graded 1/3 grade down for every day it is late beginning on Friday. This paper is worth 40% of your grade.
- Papers should be 8-10 pages (2000-2500 words) long. I'm not going to count your words but please do not write an inordinately long or short paper. Papers should be double-spaced with one inch margins. Title pages are not necessary (they waste paper), but do have a title (preferably one to which you have given some thought). Save your work in multiple places. Also, number your pages.
- Since this essay is your term paper, you will account for the entire text of Paradise Lost. In your first paper you had the first five books to work with; now you have the entire poem. While you are not *required* to cite the end of the poem, do not attempt to write the paper without finishing the reading. This paper is your argument about the text in its entirety. Please make sure to read the prefatory material on the paper topics sheet.
- I expect you to read the guidelines for paper # 1 over again. Many suggestions for that paper hold true for this one. Also, re-read the quotations handout. You are not only expected to use correct form in your use of citations, but also be very aware of effective integration, discussion of long quotations, correct ellipses use, etc.
- Please carefully read the margin and end comments I wrote on paper #1. One of the reasons why I write comments on the computer is so I can see if you've improved from one paper to the next. If you are going to make mistakes, make new mistakes. Otherwise I get the impression that you aren't interested in seeing your work progress.
- I am more than happy to meet with you to discuss your papers. Come with issues, ideas, problems. It will probably be most helpful for you if you come with actual writing--a thesis statement, at least, or a rough draft. If you come with a rough draft of your entire paper, please understand that I may not be able to read and respond to all of it. In addition to my regular office hour Wednesday from 11-12, I am having extra office hours this week: Tuesday, May 13, 2-4 p.m.; Wednesday, April 23, 1:30-4. My office is in South Hall 2431 K.

Yucky but necessary statement on plagiarism

English 162 has been a requirement for a long time. Although we work hard to create new paper topics each term, we recognize that there are lots of Milton papers floating around the campus community. We would be stupid not to be suspicious. Plagiarism occurs when one passes off as one's work the ideas or words of someone else (a published source, another student's paper, or a spoken source--lecture or discussion). I assume that all work turned in bearing your name will be your own. Quotations and ideas taken from other sources need to be fully acknowledged. If you have questions about indebtedness, please ask me. As English majors, I expect that you all know what

plagiarism is and I will treat it very seriously if it does occur. It will certainly result in failure of the assignment and possible referral to the disciplinary board. Grrr.

Here are a few more **Guidelines for writing good papers in general**:¹

Your thesis

Every paper must have a thesis which is an argumentative claim that you will be proving throughout your paper. Ask yourself if you are stating what the poem is already telling us. You want to state assertions about the text and bring new knowledge to it. For a long paper, your thesis will most likely be two or more sentences. If you cannot fill in the blanks of the sentence below as you craft your paper, it means that you do not yet have a viable thesis:

"In this paper I will argue that _____. This argument is significant because _____.

Obviously you should phrase your argument how ever you like. This practice sentence is here for you to check yourself against.

Define your terms

Word like "femininity," "psychoanalysis," or "society" mean all things to all people. define your understanding of any particularly important term you use.

Conclusions

Despite what we all learned in high school (tell them what you're going to do, do it, tell them what you just did), a good conclusion is not merely a recapitulation. It is the moment when you can nuance your argument or speculate further on the ramifications of your study. Be sure, however, to stay within the scope of the paper.

Rewrite

In particular, *always* rewrite your introduction. Most of us only discover at the end of the paper writing process just what we have found out. This means, however, that the paper seems to be groping for a focus. Once you have written your conclusion, bring that information and insight back to the beginning, so that it may guide the exposition of your paper.

Primary Text

Invariably, there comes a time when we feel that the subject is running away from us, that we've lost focus, and we don't know where the paper is going. When this happens always ground yourself back in the language of the primary text. Remember, the backbone of literary studies is the ability to work closely with the text.

¹ Adapted from Jody Enders, Guidelines for Good Paper-Writing. Department of French and Italian, UCSB.

Tense Consistency

Keep your verb tense in the present tense (which is the tense of choice for literary criticism).

Milton is brilliant

Avoid the "Milton is brilliant" school of criticism. Gushy commentaries about the beauty or brilliance of the poem or the author never advances your argument. It changes your tone from a literary critic to an admirer. Of course you may certainly believe that Milton *is* truly a genius, but this doesn't belong in a formal critical paper.

Personal Opinion

Try to avoid personal opinion. This does not mean that you cannot use "I." It does mean that the "I" that speaks in your paper is the "I" that "argues," "asserts," and "posits," not the "I" that "believes," or "feels."

Some Stylistic Particularities

- Avoid the phrase "It is interesting to note." We all say it, but it is a cop out. It suggests that you don't know why it is interesting.
- Think carefully about every word you use. Make sure you understand the word's meaning. Vocabulary choice can be as enriching as it can be misleading or confusing.
- Never use contractions or colloquialisms (informal language and slang) in formal written prose.
- Avoid the passive voice. (e.g. "Michael shows Adam the future" rather than "Adam is shown the future").
- Avoid such terms as "obviously," "clearly," and "evidently." If it's so obvious, clear, or evident to everyone, why are you including it in your paper?
- Avoid "very."
- Use strong verbs; avoid "to be" verbs. (e.g. "Eve *looks* into the reflecting water" rather than "Eve *is seeing* herself in the reflective water").
- Avoid "if only" constructions. (i.e. "If only Adam had resisted Eve's beauty, things would have turned out differently"). These kinds of statements are insupportable by the text.