Writing Assignments for Textual Analysis: Methods

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English 3001: Textual Analysis Methods

Precision Paragraphs:

In one paragraph, hone in on the topic of the day (character, irony, setting, etc.) in relation to the literature of the day. Jump right in to your analysis! For example, if the topic is character your paragraph may begin: “Hulga’s name change is not empowering but rather exposes the naivety of character. This naivety is important because…” Imagine this paragraph as part of the body of an essay. You do not need to have an overarching interpretation; instead, focus on the depth of some particular aspect. Be sure to quote from the literature.

Question and Answer Paragraph:

Write a question that the critical or theoretical apparatus of the day would ask the literature of the day. Then, write a paragraph that begins to answer that question. For example, if the interpretive framework of the day is deconstruction the question may be: “What oppositions in this story help break apart an attempt at coherent meaning?” Or, if the interpretive framework of the day is feminism the question may be: “How does the literature imagine what is possible for the male and female characters to think?” Be sure to quote from the literature.

Textual Analysis Term Paper (6-7 pages) with a one-page Methods Statement:

PURPOSE: In your paper you will make the most of the skills you have learned about literary analysis to create your own interpretation of a text (or two). You should use a variety of evidence, as you learned in the first weeks of class. You should develop your interpretation around a set of questions, as you learned by studying interpretive frameworks in the latter weeks of class; however, you are under no obligation to adhere to any one interpretive framework but will amalgamate your own critical concerns into a coherent, unified analytical practice. If you would like to use secondary, research materials that is fine; photocopy one page from each source and turn it in with your final draft.

TOPIC: You may choose any of the primary texts we have read in class. I suggest you keep your topic narrow and thus choose only one text, perhaps two or three if dealing with poetry. Write a thesis-oriented (debatable) essay that develops your interpretation of the text, or an aspect of the text. Your audience is your classmates and me.
OUTLINE: Your outline should be a detailed blueprint for your term paper including quotations with page numbers. You do not need to write in full sentences; however, your typed outline should communicate your claims and thesis.

2 PARAGRAPHS: Take two important paragraphs from somewhere out of your paper, probably the body of your paper rather than your introduction or conclusion, and single-space type them on one-page with room between paragraphs for comments. You will workshop these important paragraphs by blind review with your classmates. You may want to choose paragraphs that you are struggling with or that contain controversial analysis.

FIRST DRAFT: This draft should be solid. It will be graded by the same standards as your final draft. Type, doublespace, and use reasonable margins and fonts. Title your papers. Staple your papers. Follow MLA guidelines.

METHODS STATEMENT: In this one-page statement, explicitly state your guiding questions and your analytical concerns that lead you to your interpretive conclusions. This is a semi-informal statement; you may be candid and address your challenges and thinking process if you like. You may use “I” as relevant.

PAPER PRESENTATION: Students will present working problems and questions to their group on their assigned day.

Late Work: Late assignments will not be accepted unless you have permission from me in advance, in person, and in writing (email is fine). A late paper will be penalized one letter step for every day it is late. No assignments, including formal papers, will be accepted after one week—no exceptions. If you know you are going to miss a class in which an assignment is due, turn in the assignment early.