

American Romanticism
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Fall 2010

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR TERM PAPER (33% of your course grade)

DUE OCTOBER 29 VIA EMAIL TO ME: harveyb@fiu.edu

1. Topics will be provided (see separate link on the online syllabus, for an ongoing list), but you may devise a topic of your own.
2. Your essay should be about 3000 words (that's equivalent to ten pages double-spaced) or more, and should be polished stylistically and, of course, correct in terms of grammar, punctuation, citations, and so on. You may use whatever citation method you prefer—i.e., Chicago style (citations as endnotes) or MLA style (citations in text). *See brief explanation of the two styles at the end of this document.*
3. ***Turn your paper into me via email to harveyb@fiu.edu.*** Do not provide a cover page; put your name/classname/date turned in/your title at the top of the first page. If you do not receive a return email with “Got it”, it means I did not get it. Turn it in single-spaced.
4. Be prepared, should it be requested, to supply a draft stage of the essay (if you're wondering; this helps discourage plagiarism!). This means you must remember to permanently save a draft at some point as you are composing.
5. You must integrate at least two pieces of research. You may paraphrase, cite directly via “”s, or cite via footnotes. A (brief) Bibliography is required. This secondary material may be historical-cultural, biographical, and/or critical-interpretive, depending on your argument. It may not come directly from low-level websites (SparkNotes, Wikipedia, etc), but it may come from academic journals that are available through the web (and via the FIU library online journal section)--namely ProjectMUSE or JStor articles--or scholarly volumes in the library. *If you are not familiar with ProjectMUSE or JStor, get in touch with me and I will provide assistance or illustrate during class.*
6. Do NOT choose a comparative topic (as always, there are exceptions). (I discourage comparative topics because I want you to look at a particular text, not, as it were, between several texts.)
7. You may draw upon my lecture notes/reviews, but do not just parrot my ideas and interpretations. You do not need to cite me (“Prof. Harvey lecture on...”).
8. Refer to the Checklist at the end of this file and please note the Grading Scale. Bottom line: think hard and you get rewarded!
9. I will not look at drafts, but I will toss ideas around via email (or conference).
10. Feedback will likely be ample, and I usually encourage revisions (if a strong effort was made initially). *I probably will send you feedback through email, so please send your paper to me*

through an email address you regularly use! Anticipate feedback roughly within ten days of when you submit the paper.

11. Finally, pleazzzzeeeee ... try to have intellectual fun with your paper. Try to get yourself in the “zone” (the way you appreciate a hobby) in which you take unself-conscious pleasure in analyzing; stop worrying about a grade and getting it right, and so on.

TIPS FOR ESSAY WRITING (examples come from a variety of classes):

1. IDEAS EMERGE FROM THE TEXT. Abstraction will only carry you so far. It’s best, once you have a glimmer of an idea, to read and re-read, taking notes, circling important symptomatic passages, and making connections with kindred passages. It is quite possible to have whole paragraphs or more in your essay without reference to a particular passage (i.e. no quote), but such paragraphs can only emerge if you are truly intimate with a text and really focused on it. Look for the little oddities, etc., that lead you to track down patterns of tension in the text. Such doesn't mean that you end up writing about trivia; it just means you avoid starting with abstract themes or issues in your brain-storming/idea-generating process.

2. ARGUMENTS ARE NOT DICED-UP THEMES. One does not want to say "the theme of disease has three aspects in Blu's Hanging." We are taught to think that way in high school and in composition classes. Maybe we need to start out that way, but it leads to limited rhetorical possibilities and limited argument sophistication. It is better to think of a text as having an issue that it is "obsessed" by and needs to find a "remedy" for. Then you sort of play doctor/detective. Maybe even start your paper with an odd quote that manifests, as it were, a symptom. And then you uncover layer by layer the complexities of the issue/problem, and then show how the problem is resolved or not resolved. In an ideal world, these complexities and issues resonate with something within you, which makes you want to chase down meaning. The reader doesn't want to know what your obsessions are, but I do believe personal connections to your “objective” material makes for stronger, more incisive, and interesting arguments usually.

3. DO NOT GO INTO CELEBRATION MODE, as if you writing an introduction to some high-school edition of the text.

4. DO NOT RUN TO THE LIBRARY IMMEDIATELY. You must think through some issues before you conduct research. If you "own" an idea initially, your research will have direction and focus and you will be less likely to get lost in the morass of other scholarly perspectives. But ultimately you must be in dialogue with other specific interpretations. Good scholarship assumes an audience that is engaged in ongoing dialogues about authors or texts or issues. (For this class, I am not asking that you do a lot of secondary research—just two instances.)

5. REVISION AND RE-THINKING IS NEVER DONE. Everyone's draft-to-completion process works differently. But usually you have to go through a draft over and over and over again, heaping on layers of complexity, twists and turns, more "But this is not the real malaise the family suffers from. If we go back to the first scene, the real problem turns out to be..."s. The obvious challenge with this is that you do not have time to slowly cook the paper. But that, nonetheless, is what I am asking of you.

6. REPEAT ABOVE!

7. AUDIENCE: Assume an audience much like your fellow students--familiar with the work, but unfamiliar with your particular approach, and therefore requiring specific examples (textual evidence) to understand, appreciate, and accept your analysis and argument. Avoid plot summary or tedious repetition of an author's points without higher level analysis, however.

8. PLAY WITH TITLES (AND SUBSECTION TITLES, IF THE PAPER IS LONGER THAN 12 PAGES) early on in the process. This may seem to go against the "don't think abstractly" rule, but trying to come up with clever titles in fact can work as a good way of brainstorming, as long as you see them as being provisional. You might not even know what your title means initially! Sub-headings--when you're writing a longer paper--can help control some of those wacky ideas that get too wacky, because you know whether sub-contents fit the sub-label. *And please: your main essay title is the first chance to make an impression. A vague title (e.g., "Melville's Bartleby") that could fit any other paper written on the same author gives a vague impression, indicating that the essay to follow likely lacks a focused main point.*

9. WE MUST KNOW YOUR THESIS/MAIN POINT BY THE END OF YOUR INTRODUCTION. But don't think of a thesis as capturing the entirety of your argument or analysis. All that is needed is a nomination of the main issue/question in play (not the answer). This allows for an inductive rather than deductive approach. (Many of my tips are suggesting an inductive method of getting ideas and composing.) Please do not start off with weighty generalities about morality, the human condition, and so on. Avoid the "funnel" opening paragraph if possible. If your introduction is more than a single paragraph (it might be two paragraphs if, for instance, you were setting up an author in terms of especially pertinent historical or cultural background), give an extra line space between the introduction and paper proper.

10. QUOTES. Depositing too many long quotes in a paper wastes space. Too few or no quotes, however, suggest inattention to the text or texts. You should probably have one or two longer, inset quotes, which you set up and analyze; the purpose here is to indicate that there are especially key or symptomatic passages that warrant lingering over because they are so revelatory. Quotes, besides helping to anchor/prove your points, often lead to analytical discoveries as you ponder/unpack them.

11. FIRST REAL SECTION OF YOUR ESSAY MIGHT BE HISTORICAL. After your introduction, depending upon your topic/text, you might have some background information about the author, the era, the place, etc. This is reassuring to the reader because it makes you seem knowledgeable.

12. DEVELOPMENT. Good essays unfold a major idea or argument stage-by-stage, in a manner that will be compelling and convincing to the reader. This means that the old, boring high-school strategy of breaking down your basic idea into three (more or less disconnected) subpoints may not be the most suitable arrangement. Instead, for example, an essay (depending upon the thesis, of course) could in the first fourth highlight some intriguing contradiction or tension in a text; the next fourth might frame the tension in terms of a larger moral, literary, philosophical, religious, or historical debate or issue; and the last two fourths would illustrate the ramifications of the tension for the text you're exploring (tensions resolved? and if so, by what means? tensions not resolved? and if so, how does the author/narrator cope with irresolution?). An essay can be thoughtful and well-organized, and yet still be confusing to the reader. Most often this occurs because the essay

writer needs to provide clearer sign-posts to the overall argument. At crucial junctures (the topic sentence for a paragraph introducing a new stage of your argument), try to foreground analytical points rather than just something about character or the plot or the page-by-page sequence of a text's ideas.

There are two basic patterns of development:

Deductive: here, you state the thesis of your argument (your main point) directly up front and proceed to provide evidence for your main point. For example: you could make your main point "Equiano's obsession with status is not defensible" or "Equiano's obsession with status is justified." And then the subsequent paragraphs would present aspects of your position and your evidence for those aspects.

Dialectical/inductive: here you proceed to make successive more complex discoveries through a thesis--antithesis--synthesis pattern. For example: the first third of your paper would explore how "Equiano is obsessed with status"; the second third would explore "how Equiano is in fact filling in a void with status seeking"; and the last third would pull the two ideas together through a more complex observation, that "Equiano fills in his grief of being exiled from his native country by seeking to emulate the status values of European culture" (note how what seems to be a negative point about Equiano--that he is a sell out by seeking status--ends up to be a more complex positive point). Rhetorically, in your introduction you may want to state your overall point as "Equiano fills in his grief..." or you might want, without being vague, to state the thesis as a problem that your paper in effect solves, but without giving the solution immediately: "Clearly, Equiano's eagerness to obtain status makes his character a vexing one if we assume he should remain consistently loyal to his native country or identity."

13. IF YOU DON'T, DO READ YOUR OWN PROSE ALOUD for a better style. It is easy to start getting pompous sounding and lost in verbiage. I do it all the time! **ALSO:** print out a hard-copy and edit from a hard-copy, at least once during your drafting of your essay.

14. PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT WORKS FOR YOU WHEN YOU READ SCHOLARSHIP. This may mean specific rhetorical maneuvers (i.e., how to write an introduction), or just words that you've never used before and that have a lot of critical-theoretical possibilities packed within ("gaze" for instance). It sounds dull, but you should start keeping a list of such words if you are into literary theory.

15. DO NOT BE AFRAID OF BEING THEORETICAL, BUT DEMYSTIFY THEORY BEFORE YOU BEGIN USING IT (THIS TIP IS FOR THOSE INTERESTED IN LITERARY THEORY). Applying theory can be the direct, self-conscious application of a theoretical perspective (and perhaps querying the utility of the perspective at the same time); or the theory can mostly be in the sort of issues/content you focus on (gender issues, sexuality, body stuff, imperialism, othering); or it can be the use of a certain vocabulary (gaze, other, compulsory heterosexuality, and so on). The extent to which you actually cite theorists in your essay, if you are so inclined, is going to be highly variable according to your topic, personal style, background and so forth. Theory (to me) is best used as a brainstorming device--a lens that helps you see things you might not already see. Your own idiosyncratic interests and the need for a cogent, coherent argument that YOU believe in will do the rest. That's why I repeat the mantra of "listen to the text" AND "listen to your response." You want to avoid the ventriloquy effect of many contemporary scholarly-interpretive essays, which often all sound very much alike, all making the same moves, all citing the same theorists, and

so on.

GRADING SCALE:

A = Focused, interesting main idea suggesting that you read, re-read, and probed around the text at hand. Prose is not merely correct: it is compelling and sophisticated. Organization makes sense given the topic and argument of the paper. The paper is of sufficient quality that it could be put online as a sample paper.

B = Main idea and development are clear, but the organization is weak in a section or two, or there are a few sentence or punctuation glitches that suggest careless editing.

C = Paper has a main idea, but not thought through by attending to the text actively. Organization falls apart at key moments. Sentence construction, although usually correct, is often imprecise or wordy. Nearly every page shows signs of careless editing.

D = The thesis is vague, and the organization is very chaotic. The paper indicates little insight about or basic understanding of the author/text. Or the prose/grammar suggests the need to go to the Writing Center.

F = The paper was not turned in. Such will receive (on a 0-100 scale) a "0".

EDITING/REVISING CHECKLIST:

Three tips for effective revising:

- Revise with "fresh eyes": revise at least a day after you've completed a substantial draft.
- Use a printed copy and revise at a different locale than your computer.
- Revise in four "loops," using the revision checklist below.

Yes	No	CONTENT
___	___	sharply focused: no extraneous material
___	___	complex aspects of issue thoughtfully examined
___	___	judicious use of supporting specifics/quotes

Yes	No	ORGANIZATION & DEVELOPMENT
___	___	unified paragraphs, with clear topic sentences
___	___	transitions between ideas and sections of essay
___	___	essay unfolds stage-by-stage, no unnecessary "back-tracking" or repetition of sections

Yes	No	PROSE STYLE
___	___	straightforward and precise phrasing, without sentence fragments or run-ons
___	___	few boring "is" verbs
___	___	appropriate use of transition words
___	___	varied sentence length and patterns

Yes	No	CORRECT GRAMMAR, ETC.
___	___	correct use of possessives and punctuation
___	___	correct match between verbs and subjects
___	___	no typos/misspellings

Chicago Style Versus MLA Style of Citation

You can find lots of web sites that will explain both citation styles, but in essence:

Chicago style:

- 1) Uses standard bibliographic listing of Works Cited.
- 2) Endnotes, indexed to superscript numbers in the main text, cite the article or book that you are quoting from, paraphrasing from, or drawing upon ideas from.
- 3) Endnotes may also be substantive, mini-disquisitions: "For an excellent review of the problem of Babo, see John Doe's Melville and Slavery. However, Doe neglects to contextualize adequately Melville's concerns with violence...." Blah blah.
- 4) Some people like the mini-disquisition in the endnotes (I do); others believe if a point is important to make, make it in your main text.

MLA style:

- 1) Also uses standard bibliographic listing of Works Cited.
- 2) Tends not to use endnotes, and more "scientifically" and directly relates points you are making/borrowing to citations within your main text. E.g. "Babo has often not been contextualized (Doe, Melville and Slavery, 22-34).
- 3) The intext citations (parallel to how the sciences and social sciences typically cite) makes it seem as if what you are writing progresses from what other scholars have said. You are welcome to it, but I find it clutters my ability to read an article/paper, and the citation is often ambiguous (i.e., in the above, does "Doe" not contextualize, or does "Doe" make the observation that Babo has not been contextualized?). I rather like the verbosity of the Chicago style, but that is exactly why the MLA style was created!