

Literary Theory and Criticism

ENG 382: Sec 70

Cedar Crest College

Fall 2008; Weds. 7-9:30 PM

Room: BHA 11; Format: Seminar

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“This is not a pipe.” –René Magritte

"An essential task as critics is to continue to take apart our own privilege; to find ways to hold the tensions, sustain the ambiguities, ultimately celebrate the complex knowledge that truth is multifaceted, multicolored, appears in many guises." --Mary Ellen S. Capek

Books & Resources: The below books can be purchased from the Campus Bookstore, but feel free to pick them up elsewhere. Online booksellers (e.g. www.alibris.com, www.betterworldbooks.com) often sell texts at reduced prices.

Textbooks --

- ✓ Steven Lynn, *Texts and Contexts: Writing About Literature with Critical Theory*. 5th edition. NY: Pearson/Longman, 2008.
- ✓ K.M. Newton, ed. *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: A Reader*. 2nd edition. NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 1997.

Novels --

- ✓ Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966)
- ✓ Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing* (1972)
- ✓ Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed* (1974)

You'll also want access to the course's eCollege companion website, which will have digital copies of the syllabus, schedule, assignments, and handouts. We'll also be using the eCollege site's threaded discussion features for our online journals. The site is accessed at: www.cedarcrestonline.net. To login, you'll need a user ID and password issued to you from the Cedar Crest Registrar's Office, typically sent to your Cedar Crest email account.

Your writing for the course should follow the MLA format, so you'll want to have access to the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* or a style manual that covers the MLA style. An online companion to Diana Hacker's *Research and Documentation in the Electronic Age*, which covers the MLA and research in the Humanities, is available at: www.dianahacker.com/resdoc. See also my "Guidelines for Writing about Literature and Film."

Course Description: A study of the theories that inform 21st-century literary study, this 3-credit course investigates the acts of reading, writing, interpretation, and the philosophical ideas that inform them. Students will study schools of theory and criticism to gain a keener awareness of the ways in which they already interpret words and the world, as well as practice new ways of determining meaning.

English 382: Literary Theory and Criticism has the following educational outcomes. By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

- Demonstrate a knowledge of advanced literary theories, their evolving schools of thought, and critical debates regarding the interpretation of literature,
- Apply a range of literary theories to specific interpretations of a literature,
- Incorporate theoretical concepts and terminology into your own insights and writing about literature,
- Write effective and sophisticated literary essays that draw upon the theoretical frameworks of critical analysis, and

- Demonstrate your critical analysis and reading abilities by asking informed questions and meaningful participation in the seminar portion of the course.

The best way to develop a sense of literary theory is to read the primary essays of scholars working within its many branches, to discuss how their insights affect our own habits of interpretation, and to use the strategies of theoretical interpretation in shaping our own understandings of literature. Thus, to gauge your proficiency in meeting the above goals, ENG 382 has the following forms of assessment. You will:

- Write three analytical essays (4-5 pages each) that apply a theoretical framework to each of the novels we'll examine,
- Complete three terminology quizzes that test your knowledge of literary theory,
- Participate in both weekly on-line journal and seminar discussions based upon assigned readings, and
- Produce a seminar-length analytical paper (8-10 pages), including an annotated bibliography and review of scholarship, suitable for publication in an undergraduate literary magazine or for use as a writing sample for graduate school.

See further down the syllabus for specifics on assignments, due dates, and participation assessment.

Honor Philosophy: The Cedar Crest Honor Philosophy states that students shall uphold community standards for academic and social behavior to preserve a learning environment dedicated to personal and academic excellence. It is based upon the principle that, as a self-governing body, students have the ability to create an atmosphere of trust and support. Within this environment, individuals are empowered to make their own decisions, develop personal regard for the system under which they live, and achieve a sense of integrity and judgment that will guide them through life.

Classroom Behavior and Protocol: You're both encouraged and expected to share your understandings of the literature we'll be reading together. By sharing our interpretations, each of us will develop sharper and more widely considered understandings of the literature we're studying. A discussion—like any conversation worth having—requires both talking and listening, however, so I ask that we treat each other's contributions with their deserved respect, consider one another's interpretations with an open mind, and not attempt to impose a particular point of view on our classmates. You should argue for a particular line of interpretation to which you're committed, but do so with an openness to other ideas and a respect for disagreement.

Appropriate classroom behavior is implicit in the Cedar Crest Honor Philosophy. Such behavior is defined and guided by complete protection for the rights of all students and faculty to a courteous, respectful classroom environment. That environment is free from distractions such as late arrivals, early departures, inappropriate conversations, and any other behaviors that might disrupt instruction or otherwise compromise students' access to their Cedar Crest College education.

As we live in an age of increasing technological diversion—the call of cell phones, the click of mice, ringing in our ear—it becomes easy to forget the good manners of paying attention to those immediately around us. Please remember to silence cell phones before class begins (a vibrate setting is appropriate for emergencies). Also, refrain from checking your email or any wayward browsing of the internet during class time.

Attendance: Simply put, you must attend class.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism: Incumbent from the Honor Code, academic integrity and ethical behavior provide the foundations of the Cedar Crest scholarly community and the basis for our learning environment. Cedar Crest College expects students to set a high standard for themselves to be personally and intellectually honest and to ensure that other students do the same. This standard applies to all academic work (oral, written, or visual) completed as part of a Cedar Crest education.

Plagiarism is the act of using someone else's ideas or words and passing them off as your own without giving credit to the original source. Since a key goal of a college education is to develop and express your own ideas, plagiarism is an extremely serious academic offense.

It is dishonest to present oral or written work that is not entirely your own, except as may be approved by an instructor, and you must follow the requirements of the instructor regarding when and how much collaboration with other students is permitted. Any language taken from another source, whether individual words or entire paragraphs, must be placed in quotation marks and attributed to the source, following the citation format specified. Paraphrased material from a source

must also be attributed. In addition, if you are indebted to another source for a specific perspective or a line of argument—regardless of whether or not you’ve directly quoted the source—that debt must be acknowledged.

In this class, the penalty for plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct is a grade of F either on the individual assignment or for the entire course, to be determined by the instructor based upon the severity of the offense. All cases of academic misconduct will be kept on record with Cedar Crest College’s Provost Office.

Class Cancellation: If Cedar Crest’s campus is open, you should expect our class meetings to be held. If troublesome weather threatens to close the campus and thus cancel class, you should refer to Cedar Crest’s Inclement Weather Hotline at 610-606-4629 for notification. Of course, you should always use common sense and place your safety first when determining whether or not it’s appropriate for you to drive to campus under such conditions. If I cancel class independently of the campus closing, due to weather or for other reasons, I will send a class-wide email to your Cedar Crest account and (if possible) place an outgoing message on my office voicemail (x3474).

College Policy Regarding Learning Disabilities: Students with documented disabilities who may need academic accommodations should discuss these needs with me during the first two weeks of class. Students with disabilities who wish to request accommodations should contact Academic Services.

Assignment Format: All formal out-of-class assignments must be typewritten, stapled, and double-spaced with a 12-pt Times New Roman font and one-inch margins. Syntactically correct American English should be used. You don’t need a cover page or fancy binder, but be certain to include your name, our class information, and a descriptive title on the first page.

Deadlines and Lateness: Papers and quizzes are due on the dates listed on the course schedule at 7PM. If you’re absent from class when a paper is due, it may be submitted beforehand via the eCollege Dropbox feature for the specified assignment as an attached MSWord or RTF document. (Or, if this is not possible for some reason, assignments may be submitted via email attachment to rawilson@cedarcrest.edu.) Please do not submit assignments in a different format (WordPerfect, etc.) as they will not be counted as being received if I cannot read them: most word processing programs allow you to save files as either Word (.doc) or RTF (.rtf) documents. Assignments handed in past their due date will be reduced one letter grade (e.g. A to A-) for each 24-hour period they are late. Individual assignment extensions may be granted for extenuating circumstances (personal or family crisis, serious illness, roommate problems, etc.) but should be requested and explained as soon as possible. Computer problems are not acceptable excuses for extensions or lateness.

Description of Assignments: Your final grade for the course will be based upon three terminology quizzes, three practicum essays, weekly online journals, weekly seminar participation, and a final seminar paper. Final grades will be determined along the following assignment weights.

Practicum Essays (15% each, 3 total): Our semester will be divided into three units where we examine formalist, cultural, and historical theories of literature. As the culmination of each unit, you will write a 4-5 page paper where you try out one of these theories in an interpretation of the unit’s novel: *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Surfacing*, or *The Dispossessed*. Your writing should pay attention to my “Guidelines for Writing about Literature and Film,” and essays will be assessed according to the “Interpretive Essay Evaluation Criteria.”

Terminology Quizzes (5% each, 3 total): At the end of each unit, you’ll complete a quiz on key terminology from each of the unit’s theories. These terms will come from the essay selections in the Newton anthology and from the “Useful Terms” sections of the *Texts and Contexts* book.

Weekly Seminar Participation and Online Discussion Group Questions (15%): A seminar is a course where advanced students present their own ideas and ask informed questions alongside the professor. To facilitate the aspects of the readings you’re interested in, you’ll join a Discussion Group that will submit two questions pertaining to two different readings for each theory unit. Additionally, for each class meeting, you are expected to have completed the assigned reading ahead of time and be prepared to discuss them during class, responding to the questions and comments of your classmates. Participation will be evaluated according to the below rubric.

Evaluation of Course Participation	
Grade	Criteria
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently raises thoughtful questions and proposes original ideas based upon course texts and concepts. Makes substantive connections, criticisms, and interpretations between multiple texts. Goes beyond those interpretations presented in lectures and readings. Regularly cites specific textual evidence (passages from the readings, scenes from a film, etc.). When offering reader-response to a text or drawing upon personal experience or anecdotal evidence, regularly bases those reactions in a clear understanding of how textual language and images operate. Regularly engaged in discussion with professor and classmates, and responds constructively to questions and alternative interpretations. Maintains consistent participation throughout the semester. Demonstrates excellent understanding of course texts and concepts.
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frequently contributes to discussion with relevant points and questions drawn from course texts and concepts. Tends to cite specific textual evidence. May rely upon reader-response to a text, personal experience, or anecdotal evidence with a vague understanding of how textual language and images operate. Listens attentively to discussion with professor and classmates, and responds to questions and alternative interpretations. Maintains regular participation throughout the semester. Demonstrates good understanding of course texts and concepts.
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Infrequently contributes to discussion except when called upon, but contributions demonstrate familiarity with essential course texts and concepts. Occasionally cites textual evidence. Relies heavily upon unqualified reader-response to a text, personal experience, or anecdotal evidence without reference to how textual language and images operate. Listens to discussion with professor and classmates, but does not respond to questions or alternative interpretations. Participation variable throughout the semester. Demonstrates competent understanding of course texts and concepts.
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rarely contributes to class discussion except when called upon and contributions are off-topic and do not reference course texts and concepts. Does not cite textual evidence. Relies almost exclusively upon unqualified reader-response to a text, personal experience, or anecdotal evidence without reference to how textual language and images operate. Absent from several classes. Demonstrates unsatisfactory understanding of course texts and concepts.
F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fails to contribute to class discussion. Absent from multiple classes. Demonstrates negligible understanding of course texts and concepts

Final Analytical Paper (25%): As the culminating exercise of our semester, you'll produce a seminar paper of between 8-10 pages that revises and expands one of your three unit papers on *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Surfacing*, or *The Dispossessed*. The paper will have a research requirement of secondary scholarship on your chosen novel that you will present in an annotated bibliography and in a research summary in your writing. You will also give a brief presentation (10 minutes) of your seminar paper at our last semester meeting. Your seminar paper should be suitable for presentation at a literary studies conference, for a graduate school writing sample, or for publication in an undergraduate literary studies journal.

Grades: Your final grade for the course will be determined along the following point values per assignment.

<p>Unit One: Formalism, Reader Response, Structuralism, & Deconstruction</p> <p>_____/10 pts Group Discussion Questions</p> <p>_____/10 pts <i>Lot 49</i> Discussion Questions</p> <p>_____/30 pts Seminar Participation</p> <p>_____/50 pts Terminology Quiz</p> <p>_____/150 pts Essay 1</p>	<p>Unit Three: Historicism, Cultural Materialism, Marxism & Economic Theory, & Postcolonialism</p> <p>_____/10 pts Group Discussion Questions</p> <p>_____/10 pts <i>Dispossessed</i> Disc. Ques.</p> <p>_____/30 pts Seminar Participation</p> <p>_____/50 pts Terminology Quiz</p> <p>_____/150 pts Essay 3</p>	<p>Grades for the course will be issued according to the following percentages:</p> <p>94-100% A</p> <p>90-93.99% A-</p> <p>87-89.99% B+</p> <p>84-86.99% B</p> <p>80-83.99% B-</p> <p>77-79.99% C+</p> <p>74-76.99% C</p> <p>70-73.99% C-</p> <p>67-69.99% D+</p> <p>60-66.99% D</p> <p>0-59.99% F</p>
<p>Unit Two: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, Gender Studies, Postmodernism, & New Pragmatism</p> <p>_____/10 pts Group Discussion Questions</p> <p>_____/10 pts <i>Surfacing</i> Disc. Questions</p> <p>_____/30 pts Seminar Participation</p> <p>_____/50 pts Terminology Quiz</p> <p>_____/150 pts Essay 2</p>	<p>Seminar Paper:</p> <p>_____/25 pts In-Class Presentation</p> <p>_____/25 pts Annotated Bibliography</p> <p>_____/200 pts Seminar Paper</p> <p>_____/1000 Total Points</p>	

Caveat: We may alter the syllabus and schedule throughout the semester. I'm also open to suggestions about changes to readings and assignments if you have particular areas of the course content that you'd like to emphasize.

ENG 382 Course Schedule: Fall 2008

Date	Topic	Readings/Assignments Due
8/27	Where We Learn to Ask, Why is Literature Important? What Can It Tell Us?	<p>Texts and Contexts: Chapters 1, "An Introduction," and 2, "Critical Worlds: A Selective Tour" (pp. 3-37) Margaret Atwood, "Happy Endings"; Lionel Trilling, from "The Meaning of a Literary Idea"; and Susan Sontag, from "Against Interpretation" (Handouts) <i>Note that the college is on Labor Day Break on Monday 9/1.</i> Discussion Group Sign-Up</p>
Unit 1: Formalism, Reader-Response, Structuralism, and Deconstruction		
9/3	Formalisms: British, Russian & American When We Consider Literature as Art and Technique.	<p>Texts and Contexts: Chapter 3, "Unifying the Work: New Criticism" (pp. 39-65) 20th-Century Literary Theory: Introduction (pp. xiii-xix), Chapter I, "Russian Formalism and Prague Structuralism" (pp. 1-2), and Chapter II, "The New Criticism and Leavisian Criticism" (pp. 19-21); Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique" (pp. 3-5); Cleanth Brooks, "The Formalist Critic" (pp. 26-30); Kenneth Burke, "Formalist Criticism: It's Principles and Limits" (pp. 30-34); F.R. Leavis, "Literary Criticism and Philosophy" (pp. 37-40); How Fiction Works (2008): James Woods, from "Language" (pp. 181-186, Handout/eCollege) Walter Kirn, "A Not So Common Reader." <i>The NYTimes Book Review</i>. (17 August 2008, p. 1+, Handout/eCollege) Discussion Group 1 Questions Due (2 questions on different readings for tonight posted to eCollege discussion thread at least an hour before class.)</p>
9/10	Reader-Response Criticism: How Do Readers Shape the Literature They Read?	<p>Texts and Contexts: Chapter 4, "Creating the Text: Reader-Response Criticism" (pp. 66-105) 20th-Century Literary Theory: Chapter IX, "Reception Theory and Reader-Response Criticism" (pp. 187-89); Wolfgang Iser, "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response" (pp. 195-200); David Bleich, "The Subjective Character of Critical Interpretation" (pp. 200-03); Stanley Fish, "Interpreting the Variorum" (pp. 203-09) Discussion Group 2 Questions Due (2 questions on different readings for tonight posted to eCollege discussion thread at least an hour before class.) <i>Are you planning to graduate this winter? Monday 9/15 is the deadline to apply for January graduation.</i></p>
9/17	Structuralism & Deconstruction: Whereupon We Find Literature in a System of Language & Then Reveal that System's Fractures	<p>Texts and Contexts: Chapter 5, "Opening up the Text: Structuralism and Deconstruction" (pp. 106-143) 20th-Century Literary Theory: Chapter V, "Structuralism and Semiotics" (pp. 83-85); Tzvetan Todorov, "Definition of Poetics" (pp. 86-89); Gérard Genette, "Structuralism and Literary Criticism" (pp. 89-93) 20th-Century Literary Theory (cont'd): Chapter VI, "Post-Structuralism" (pp. 112-14); Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" (pp. 120-23); Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (pp. 115-20); Julia Kristeva, "The System and the Speaking Subject" (pp. 123-29) Discussion Group 3 Questions Due (2 questions on different readings for tonight posted to eCollege discussion thread at least an hour before class.)</p>
9/24	Unit 1 Practicum	<p>Thomas Pynchon, <i>The Crying of Lot 49</i> (1966): Formalist, Reader Response, Structuralist, & Deconstructionist Interpretations. All Discussion Groups Submit Questions (2 questions on tonight's novel, drawn from the unit's different theoretical perspectives, posted to eCollege discussion thread at least an hour before class.) Unit 1 Terminology Quiz</p>
Unit 2: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, Gender Studies, Postmodernism, and New Pragmatism		
10/1	Psychoanalytic Criticism: What Relationship Does Literature Have With the Human Psyche?	<p style="text-align: center;">ESSAY 1 DUE</p> <p>Texts and Contexts: Chapter 7, "Minding the Work: Psychological Criticism" (pp. 198-225) 20th-Century Literary Theory: Chapter VII, "Psychoanalytic Criticism," (pp. 142-43); Norman N. Holland, "Reading and Identity: A Psychoanalytic Revolution" (pp. 143-48); Harold Bloom, "Poetry, Revisionism, and Repression" (pp. 148-52); Shoshana Felman, "The Madness of Interpretation: Literature and Psychoanalysis" (pp. 153-57) Discussion Group 1 Questions Due (2 questions on different readings for tonight posted to eCollege discussion thread at least an hour before class.)</p>

10/8	Feminism and Gender Studies: How Do We Understand the Feminine and Masculine of Literature?	<i>Texts and Contexts</i> : Chapter 8, “Gendering the Text: Feminist Criticism, Post-Feminism, and Queer Theory” (pp. 226-265) <i>20th-Century Literary Theory</i> : Chapter X, “Feminist Criticism” (pp. 210-11); Josephine Donovan, “Beyond the Net: Feminist Criticism as Moral Criticism” (pp. 211-15); Elaine Showalter, “Towards a Feminist Poetics” (pp. 216-19); Elizabeth A. Meese, “Sexual Politics and Critical Judgment” (pp. 220-24); Hélène Cixous, “Conversations” (pp. 225-33). Discussion Group 2 Questions Due (2 questions on different readings for tonight posted to eCollege discussion thread at least an hour before class.) <i>Note that Fall Break is 10/13-10/14.</i>
10/15	Postmodernism & New Pragmatism: Is the Meaning of a Word Necessary or Just Convenient?	<i>Texts and Contexts</i> : Lynn’s textbook does not cover Postmodern or Pragmatist strategies; therefore, we’ll consult Peter Barry’s Beginning Theory for its chapter on “Postmodernism” (eCollege PDF file). <i>20th-Century Literary Theory</i> : Chapter XIII, “Postmodernism” (pp. 266-67) and Chapter XII, “New Pragmatism” (pp. 253-54) Frederic Jameson: “Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism” (pp. 267-75); Stanley Fish, “Consequences” (pp. 260-65) Discussion Group 3 Questions Due (2 questions on different readings for tonight posted to eCollege discussion thread at least an hour before class.)
10/22	Unit 2 Practicum	Margaret Atwood, <i>Surfacing</i> (1972): Psychological, Feminist, & Postmodern Interpretations All Discussion Groups Submit Questions (2 questions on tonight’s novel, drawn from the unit’s different theoretical perspectives, posted to eCollege discussion thread at least an hour before class.) Unit 2 Terminology Quiz
Unit 3: Historical, Economic, and Postcolonial Theories		
10/29	Historicism & Cultural Materialism: In What Ways Does Literature Contribute to the Narrative of History?	ESSAY 2 DUE <i>Texts and Contexts</i> : Chapter 6, “Connecting the Text: Historical, Postcolonial, and Cultural Studies” (pp. 145-197) (Pay particular attention to the material on historical and cultural strategies.) <i>20th-Century Literary Theory</i> : Chapter XI, “Cultural Materialism and New Historicism” (pp. 234-35); Raymond Williams, “Dominant, Residual, and Emergent” (pp. 235-39); Louis A Montrose, “Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture” (pp. 240-47); Alan Sinfield, “Reading Dissidence” (pp. 247-52) Discussion Group 1 Questions Due (2 questions on different readings for tonight posted to eCollege discussion thread at least an hour before class.)
11/5	Marxism and New Economic Criticism: Where We Consider the Political Economy of Literature	<i>Texts and Contexts</i> : Chapter 6, “Connecting the Text: Historical, Postcolonial, and Cultural Studies” (pp. 145-197) (Pay particular attention to the material on Marxist criticism.) <i>20th-Century Literary Theory</i> : Chapter VIII, “Marxist and Neo-Marxist Criticism” (pp. 158-60); Georg Lukács, “Critical Realism and Socialist Realism” (pp. 163-66); Terry Eagleton, “Towards a Science of the Text” (pp. 171-76) Frederic Jameson, “On Interpretation: Literature as a Socially Symbolic Act.” (pp. 181-86) Discussion Group 2 Questions Due (2 questions on different readings for tonight posted to eCollege discussion thread at least an hour before class.) <i>Note that Monday 11/10 at 4PM is the semester deadline for course withdrawal, and this is a good time to check on how you’re doing in all of your classes.</i>
11/12	Postcolonialism: Where We Find Literature After and Within Empire	<i>Texts and Contexts</i> : Chapter 6, “Connecting the Text: Historical, Postcolonial, and Cultural Studies” (pp. 145-197) (Pay particular attention to the material on postcolonial strategies.) <i>20th-Century Literary Theory</i> : Chapter XIV, “Post-Colonial Criticism” (pp. 283-84); Edward W. Said, “Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories” (pp. 284-93); Homi K Bhabha, “The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse” (pp. 293-301) Discussion Group 3 Questions Due (2 questions on different readings for tonight posted to eCollege discussion thread at least an hour before class.)
11/19	Unit 3 Practicum	Ursula K. Le Guin, <i>The Dispossessed</i> (1974): Historicist, Marxist, & Postcolonial Interpretations All Discussion Groups Submit Questions (2 questions on tonight’s novel, drawn from the unit’s different theoretical perspectives, posted to eCollege discussion thread at least an hour before class.) Unit 3 Terminology Quiz
11/25 (Tues)		ESSAY 3 DUE Your practicum paper on <i>The Dispossessed</i> is due before the college goes on Thanksgiving break. You may submit it via the eCollege Assignment dropbox.
11/26		No Class: Thanksgiving Break (11/26-12/30)
Seminar Research Paper		
12/3		Research Paper Presentations
12/10		Annotated Bibliography Due Seminar Paper Due: 7PM (If you’d like your final class materials, please make arrangements to pick them up from me after the semester.)

Guidelines for Writing about Literature and Film

What follows are my suggestions and expectations for your analytical paper writing in this course. Before anything else, your writing should present thoughtful ideas accompanied by specific evidence from the literary or film text about which you are writing.

Argue for a Precisely Stated Claim: Your paper should pose an insightful claim, or a series of claims, in which you argue for a precise and explicitly stated interpretation of the text. Use this as a moment where you develop *your* ideas, *your* original insights into what we've been reading and discussing as a class. Neither my recited back observations nor the comments of your classmates, warmed over and served up for seconds, should appear as the sole perspective of your paper. Also, there should be nothing vague about how you express your ideas—they should be articulated in such a manner that they can be understood in only one way. You'll want to lucidly express your claim in a declarative thesis statement, probably written as part of your introduction, but certainly early on within your paper.

Write About Something Important to You: The importance of your education weighs too heavily to spend time writing about things that don't matter. You should write about what you feel is important, some point of view to which you are committed. Try to find something about which you are curious, something that's of interest and intrigues you. Be bold; be original. Don't be afraid to experiment. And, hey, have some fun as you're explaining your ideas.

Give Your Claims Some Thought: I expect that each of you will spend time *thinking* about your interpretations. The first ideas you have about a work of literature are very likely to be similar to what your classmates have thought about it. Add depth and complexity to these initial thoughts. Stay away from simpler, more obvious claims: "John Donne shows that he really loves his wife in 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning.'" Offer ideas which respect how complex the world that we live in really is: "'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning' uses metaphoric device to demonstrate how love transcends mere physicality."

Don't Summarize the Plot: Remember that these are *analytical* papers where you are meant to offer your insight in a precise interpretation. Thus, the energy of your writing should be devoted to explaining your ideas, not issuing a book report. You should *not* summarize the plot or simply describe the characters—in fact, you should only do so insofar as it clarifies your own ideas.

Develop a Coherent Argument: If I give you a specific writing prompt, it'll very likely be a series of questions, rather than a declared mission where you're expected to fulfill a set of given writing commands. Remember, the goal of this class is to help you develop your ideas, not expect you to write a pre-scripted essay based on my questions. Thus, it's better if you use these prompt questions as a way of stimulating your own thoughts, not as a list you need to answer one by one. (Note: in essay exam writing, where you may be given a similar series of questions, the matter is often somewhat different—there you should be careful about addressing each question.) You should unify your ideas into a coherent argument, and thus may need to set appropriate limits to what it is you're writing about. Provide transitions when you move between topics and ideas to demonstrate how they're related to each other. In general, the narrower your topic, the better your writing will be—it's better to do more with less, than less with more.

Decide Upon a Logical Organization: Organize your writing along a pattern that seems to make the most sense. I strongly advise you *against* using a chronological pattern, one in which you follow in order the events of a plot (beginning with what happens first and closing with what happens last). A chronological pattern all too often seduces you into summarizing the plot, rather than privileging your ideas. So, you might arrange the points of your paper in either ascending or descending order of importance. Or, you might first analyze one character, then another, then another, etc. Or, you might alternate back and forth between two characters or scenes. Or, you might move between analyzing an author's different uses of a literary device, metaphors or symbols. Find something that seems to organically develop from your ideas. If you can indicate the organization of your writing early on in your paper, readers will have a map of your ideas and how you'll develop them. We all like maps to get where we're going. ("First, I'll review what other critics have written about 'The Raven,' then I'll compare this "ebony bird" to other symbols in the poem, and then I'll conclude by arguing my point about the sanity of the narrator." This statement is vague about the points to be made—can you characterize what other critics have written? Can you explain what the symbols stand for? What is your argument about the narrator's sanity? But, it provides a sense of structure to the coming essay.)

Provide Textual Evidence for Your Claims: When you present an idea about the literature, always refer to a specific passage of the text in which that idea is based. This is known as supplying *textual evidence* for your argument. As Socrates teaches us, the only ideas worth having are those you can support with rational evidence. Bold ideas are great, but you must provide proof in order to convince others of them.

Use Literary and Film Studies Concepts and Terminology: The concepts and terminology we discuss as a class demonstrate an awareness of how writers, filmmakers, and scholars have come to understand their works and the society that serves as their audience. Incorporate a sense of sophistication to your writing by developing and expressing your ideas with an awareness of these terms—know the difference between an author and a narrator, the stylistic effects of *anaphora*, why film prefers the term *diegesis* in place of narrative.

Assume an Inquisitive but Skeptical Audience: Your writing may work best if you assume a reader who is familiar with the work that you're writing about but needs to be reminded of specific scenes or lines as you make your points. Remember not to summarize the story and you should be selective about the quotations you use. You should presume also that your reader is curious about what you have to say, but either antagonistic to your points or at least skeptical about the claims you're making. Imagine yourself arguing a case before an open-minded jury.

Cite Where Your Evidence Can Be Found: For each passage or line of a work you refer to, either primary or secondary, be certain to properly cite where that reference can be located (MLA style is most appropriate). This is done by giving the page number in parentheses following a prose reference: for example, Hawthorne describes the symbol of Hester Prynne's public shame with, "On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread, appeared the letter A" (57). With poetry you cite the line number, like this: Poe's narrator in "The Raven" awakens from a near nap, as he comments, "While I nodded nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping" (3). Quotations of prose over three lines long, or of poems over four lines, should be completely indented a half-inch from the left margin and need not appear in quotation marks (you still need the page/line reference, but outside the end punctuation in this case). A "Works Cited" page, or bibliography, should provide an alphabetized list of the publication information for all the works you are referencing:

Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Raven." *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003. 29-33.

Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Raven*. Commentator, Edmund Clarence Stedman. Illustrator, Gustave Doré. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1884. *Project Gutenberg*. 30 Nov. 2005. Accessed: 12 May 2007
<<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/17192/17192-h/17192-h.htm>>

With a film, you don't have pages or lines to quote from or cite. This makes a particular challenge for writing a film interpretation: you must give detailed descriptions of the scenes, images, or characters you want to emphasize in your writing. Your "Works Cited" page should format film information as such:

Psycho. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. 1960. DVD Universal Studios. 1998.

And, finally, the titles of longer works, such as books or movies, are either underlined or *italicized*, while the titles of shorter works, such as poems or short stories, are framed in "quotation marks."

Also Give Credit to Secondary Sources: Your assignments may vary as to whether or not you're required to refer to secondary sources (what literary critics have to say) or even if you'll need to put in your own research to find such material. Nevertheless, whenever you do refer to some outside source, be it from print material or the Internet, you also need to cite *every* idea and reference you take from that work. Quotations from secondary sources are also placed in quotation marks; summaries and paraphrases should be rewritten into your own language. College is a place to develop your own ideas, so you need to distinguish what you think from what others tell you to think. Plus, if you don't cite these sources properly, that's plagiarism, and bad, bad things happen to those who plagiarize. Bad, bad things.

Properly Format Your Paper: Your paper should be typewritten, stapled, and double-spaced with standard margins and a 12 pt Times New Roman font. No one will be impressed by your ability to stretch margins or print in a larger font. You don't need a cover page, but should give your paper a title. Syntactically correct English should be used.

EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR ESSAYS ABOUT LITERATURE AND FILM

What is my point of view?	<p>Interpretive Argument: Your essay should present a claim about the range of possible meanings in a literary or film text (both literal and figurative) and establish why readers should consider the particular explanation you offer. Interpretive claims may take a number of forms depending upon the assignment or your line of development (the work’s formal elements that attempt to have you understand it a certain way, the historical and cultural contexts of which the work is a part, etc.).</p>
What evidence from the text justifies my point of view?	<p>Analysis of Text: Analysis refers to the act of dividing a text into its parts (various passages, characters, stylistic qualities, plot structure, etc.) and closely scrutinizing those parts to explain how the work establishes its meaning. In analyzing works of literature and film, it’s important to provide <i>direct textual evidence</i> and to explain how those textual moments (words, film shots, etc.) justify the interpretive claim you are making. This process is known as “close reading” or textual explication, the act of making the implicit meaning of a text explicit for your readers.</p>
Why is my interpretation significant?	<p>Contextual Significance & Research: Your claims about a film or literary text should place your interpretation of a work in its historical, cultural, or artistic context. For example, your claims might answer one of the following questions: Why does the work stand out in history? What does it tell us about the culture that produced it? What does it tell us about the culture that reads it? How does the work stand out from or compare to other works of film or literature? Essay assignments may have a research component, and the secondary sources you refer to should be appropriate for college-level scholarship. Research sources must come from publications that have been peer-reviewed by experts, not from popular reference materials (reader guides, encyclopedias, etc.).</p>
Do I relate my interpretation to course concepts and literary or film conventions?	<p>Literary/Film Conventions & Terminology: Your interpretive analysis should frame your claims in the context of questions raised with class material—the lines of inquiry with which we approach our subject. This may include interpretations based on formal (artistic), audience, historical, psychological, gender, or economic analyses. You should use literary or film terminology when appropriate and explain how an element of the work uniquely functions within its artistic or cultural conventions.</p>
How well written is my essay?	<p>Style, Mechanics, & Revision Process: The quality of your writing should represent your best work, drawing upon a thoughtful revision process. Use the assignment time to conference with your instructor, to workshop with your classmates, and to consult with the Writing Center on drafts of your essay. You should respond to revision suggestions and constructive criticism to develop the thoughtfulness of your claims, not only to tidy up surface errors.</p>
Do I properly format my essay and cite my sources?	<p>MLA Documentation: The Modern Language Association is the appropriate style for essay about literature and film. It emphasizes minimal citation information within parenthetical references. (Refer to our Guidelines for Writing about Literature and Film and an MLA style manual for specific information.) The final manuscript you submit should be of publishable quality.</p>

INTERPRETIVE ESSAYS ABOUT LITERATURE AND FILM: EVALUATION CRITERIA

	Exceptional (A)	Good (B)	Satisfactory (C)	Unsatisfactory (D)	Failing (F)
Interpretive Claim	Insightful and cogent interpretation that proves exceptional for undergraduate writing. Essay explores possible meanings of a text and persuasively argues for a nuanced and specific interpretation.	Convincing interpretation that goes beyond common wisdom or first impressions of a work's meaning. Demonstrates that the writer has engaged in reflective thought that considers a range of textual meanings.	Establishes a point of view about the work's significance and meaning, demonstrating that the writer has engaged in critical thinking and reflective thought about the work.	Interpretation may express a point of view but the interpretation is thinly developed, repeats back clichéd understandings of the work, or relies heavily upon plot summary.	Fails to establish an individual interpretation, only reports on other's arguments or information, or relies entirely upon plot summary.
Analysis of Text	Provides an explication of several examples' unobvious meaning; closely reads language or image to show the complexity of how examples could be understood.	Develops interpretation through comprehensive examples chosen to demonstrate the depth of a text's meaning, showing its possible coherence, contradictions, and ambiguities.	Establishes interpretation through appropriate textual examples (passages or lines, scenes or shots, etc.), showing how the parts of a work establish its meaning.	Includes textual examples but those provided are scant, over-generalized, or inadequate to illustrate interpretive claims.	Does not provide appropriate textual examples or those provided fail to establish an analytical understanding of how the parts of a text establish its meaning.
Contextual Significance & Research	Synthesizes information regarding a work's historical, cultural, and artistic importance to demonstrate how the text uniquely fits within that context. Essay's claims contribute to ongoing interpretive debates presented in researched sources.	Effectively establishes a work's historical, cultural, and artistic importance to demonstrate the text's role within that context. Researched sources are clearly relevant to interpretation and provide a background for understanding essay's claims.	Establishes historical, cultural, or artistic importance of a work based upon class lecture, discussion, and research. Researched sources (if required) are relevant to interpretation and appropriate for college-level scholarship.	Incorrectly refers to a work's historical, cultural, or artistic context. Researched sources (if required) are misunderstood or are inappropriate for college-level scholarship.	Fails to refer to, or makes consistent errors in referring to, a work's historical, cultural, or artistic context. Researched sources (if required) are irrelevant to interpretive claims or inappropriate for college-level scholarship.
Literary/Film Conventions & Terminology	Applies conventions of theoretical inquiry and terminology to produce new understandings of the work. Demonstrates the text's distinctive use of literary or film conventions.	Effectively draws upon a theoretical line of inquiry to develop interpretive claim (formalist, reader-response, psychological, economic, etc.). Literary or film terminology appropriately applied to specific textual examples.	Incorporates a meaningful sense of literary or film conventions of interpretation and analysis. Applies literary or film terminology correctly to textual elements.	Incorrectly refers to literary and film conventions, or refers to them only in a cursory way. Incorrectly uses literary and film terminology.	Does not refer to literary and film conventions of analysis, or critically misapplies them. Fails to use literary and film terminology appropriately.
Style, Mechanics & Revision	A comfortable and persuasive scholarly voice, clear articulation of a complex interpretive claim, & a logical organization. Essay builds upon constructive criticism to develop and improve the thoughtfulness of its claims.	A persuasive scholarly style, unambiguous statement of interpretive claim, & a clear organization. Essay demonstrates sound revision decisions based upon instructor, workshop, or Writing Center feedback.	A workable academic style that demonstrates its claim through a direct thesis and appropriate organization. Generally free of grammatical and mechanical errors.	An awkward style that presents an ambiguous and unspecific claim or an unclear organization. Errors in grammar and mechanics interfere with essay's readability.	An awkward and unacceptable style that fails to present an interpretive claim and uses an illogical organization. Pervasive errors in grammar and mechanics obscure the essay's readability.
Format & Documentation	Effectively uses MLA documentation style. Carefully presents source passages for their interpretive complexity in a minimal but sufficient style. Distinguishes secondary source arguments from writer's own claims. Manuscript format is readable and suitable for publication.	Efficiently uses MLA documentation style, selecting source passages for their contributions to interpretive claims. Manuscript is formatted for ease of reading.	Correctly uses MLA documentation style and format, including parenthetical citations (author, line, or page references) and an alphabetized Works Cited list. Cites both primary literary or film texts as well as secondary scholarly sources.	Incorrect use of MLA style and format conventions. Unclear boundary between writer's analysis and source material. Obscures where primary and secondary references can be found.	Fails to use MLA style and format conventions correctly, does not cite where references can be directly found, or plagiarizes source material.