

Senior Research Project Assignment Description

General Assignment Description

This assignment is composed of two major elements, each of which is crucial to the completion of the assignment. The first element is the writing of a research paper aiming at the style and rigor of a critical journal article. The second is the presentation and defense of the research paper before a multidisciplinary panel of instructors, mostly from the humanities department at Alma Heights Christian Academy. This assignment attempts to engage the student in research and presentation skills that will serve him well in the college and university environment.

Research Paper Element

The paper should take as its subject some literary topic. The thesis must be in some way original to the student and critical in its approach. The thesis may be interdisciplinary in nature, but the focus must be primarily literary. A discussion of sociological elements within a given author's works, for example, would be acceptable only if the student engaged in a close reading of the text as the predominant method for gathering evidence to support her conclusions.

The research paper assignment is stepped to ensure timely completion of the individual components leading up to the final product. See the *assignment schedule* for the due dates of these individual components.

Following are the steps that should be taken in writing the paper:

1) Decide what to study (e.g., an author or authors' works, a genre, works within a particular period of a national literature, a group of authors who wrote as a part of a school of thought).

Then, depending on the choice...

An Author

- 2) Choose the author.
- 3) Find an authoritative biography of the author in question and browse it for essential details.
- 4) Choose representative works of that author.

Work Within a Particular Period of a National Literature

- 2) Choose a period within the history of, e.g., a national literature to study.
- 3) Find an authoritative and preferably annotated anthology of this period.
- 4) Choose a list of authors or works who are seminal or exemplary of some subset of this period.

A Controlling School of Thought

- 2) Choose a controlling theory (e.g. existentialist novelists, metaphysical poets, or feminist essayists).
- 3) Search for an authoritative source, probably a lecture series or anthology which outlines a series of authors in this vein.
- 4) Choose representative works of authors who in some way exemplify or espouse this theory.

Process continued...

- 5) Acquire and read as much of the primary source material (i.e., the work or works in question) as possible.
- 6) Engage in general research to ascertain the historical, political, sociological, and theoretical setting and the thriving literary issues in the study of the subject. Do this by browsing relevant scholarly journal articles and books.
- 7) Become familiar with the terms and theories which are crucial to understanding these issues by consulting a dictionary of literary terms and literary theory or another general reference work within an ancillary discipline.
- 8) Become familiar with the critical corpus (i.e. the body of academic writing) that has accreted around the subject.
- 9) Seek advice on direction from the instructor.

- 10) Decide on an initial theoretical direction.
- 11) Form a working thesis.
- 12) Develop a working annotated bibliography.
- 13) Scour ready sources for references.
- 14) Put in inter-library loan requests at local libraries for sources they do not readily provide.
- 15) Take extensive notes on the sources.
- 16) Based on further research, revise the thesis.
- 17) Write an initial outline of the paper.
- 18) Revise the outline after further research.
- 19) Write a rough draft of the paper, including footnoted references.
- 20) Rewrite the rough draft with an eye toward clarity of expression and grammatical correctness.
- 21) Pare down the bibliography to a list of works cited in the paper, composing an initial "Works Cited" page.
- 22) For a different perspective, ask a respected person to read the paper for possible inconsistencies.
- 23) Revise the paper according to helpful suggestions.
- 24) Provide a proof copy to the instructor for review.
- 25) Revise the paper according to the instructor's suggestions.
- 26) Proofread and correct the final copy.

Presentation and Defense Element

The presentation and defense element is a traditional way to ensure that a student has mastered her subject of study. An oral defense allows the student an opportunity to express herself on a subject that she has had an opportunity to become competent to discuss. It allows the faculty a chance to cooperatively scrutinize the student for signs that she has achieved a modest level of refinement with respect to oral and written communication and literary understanding and that her writing skills are sufficiently sharp. The defense also allows the faculty to gauge a student's critical thinking skills and determine her readiness for the more sophisticated research papers expected in colleges and universities. In the end, we hope to be able to recommend the student as having acquired the skills necessary to succeed in further academic study.

The following steps and suggestions will lead up to and be included in the oral defense element:

- (1) Re-read the paper.
- (2) Revise the original outline to a form that could be discussed in a ten minute review.
- (3) Write an abstract of the paper for panel members.
- (4) Submit the abstract to the instructor for review.
- (5) Revise the abstract based on the instructor's suggestions.
- (6) Submit a final copy of the revised abstract to the instructor.
- (7) Practice delivering the main thrust of the argument and supporting points based on the outline, trimming excess and repetition where possible. Repeat as much as is necessary.
- (8) Attempt to anticipate questions from the panel members and attempt to formulate answers to them before the examination. Consider writing out possible questions and answers on a separate note card.
- (9) Show up at least ten minutes early for the scheduled defense.
- (10) Enter the room only when called.
- (11) Walk into the room and greet the panel members.
- (12) Take the seat provided by the panel chair.
- (13) Remember that the student presentation is only one small part of the examination.
- (14) Begin delivering the presentation only when asked to do so by the chair.
- (15) Expect an occasional interruption from the panel requesting clarification of a point.
- (16) When the initial presentation is finished, the chair will ask the panel to begin questioning.
- (17) Wait until the panelist has finished asking the question before responding.
- (18) Make responses as elaborate as necessary but do not engage in longwinded tautology.
- (19) When confused by a question, ask for clarification.
- (20) Before answering a particularly incisive question, pause and respond with appropriate gravity.
- (21) Resist the temptation to try to cover up for not knowing and answer by talking a lot. Be honest. Say: "I Don't know."
- (22) Be very gracious and solicitous but not officious throughout the examination.
- (23) Thank the ladies and gentlemen of the panel when dismissed by the chair.
- (24) Do not immediately invite the next participant into the room.