Reflections on Student Work: Writing Assignment 1

Comparison in Quality of Work awarded 10/10 and 9/10

All four of these students followed the instructions for the assignment and did more than the minimum for credit. If one looks closely at the details of the work submitted, however, one notes that the papers given 9/10 were significantly inferior to those given 10/10. If they had been graded with more scrutiny and with a more detailed rubric, these grades might have been lower (in the 7-8 range).

(10/10)
This student’s work is very good (although not outstanding); nevertheless, it hits all the marks and does so with few grammatical errors (“the Homer’s” for “Homer’s” in line 1; “Odysseus” for “Odysseus’ men” at the end of the first para). Not only is it well-written, showing evidence of editing, it goes beyond the prompt in choosing interesting examples for comparison (that were not among the most obvious, but yet complemented one another in theme) and by making a sophisticated statement tying them together (noting that Hermes’ intervention with Odysseus can also be seen as an intervention with Circe). The student also includes a nuanced speculation about what these scenes might tell us about Greek attitudes towards the divine that goes beyond what most students were capable of expressing.

(10/10)
This student’s essay exceeded the page limit, but the extra work displayed her sophisticated engagement with the text and careful thought about the prompt. There was no penalty for going over limit, although guidelines specified that full credit would be given for a word count of 300. The essay is well-written but errors such as dropped quotations are neither noted nor penalized. The student selects two examples for evidence that complement each other nicely, by both showing two diverse aspects of divine intervention, and by focusing on the varying roles of Poseidon in the poem. Although longer than it needs to be, comparison between the two intervention episodes is thorough and nuanced, exploring how the gods’ “personalities” govern their interactions with Odysseus. Student gives careful thought to how to use the chosen examples to illustrate Greek attitudes towards the divine (even though she generalizes about “us” rather than specifically about the Greeks.

(9/10)
The essay “checks all the boxes” for satisfying the requirements, but does nothing beyond that. There is little attention to formal detail, such as not italicizing “Odyssey;” and capitalizing “God” and “Gods;” structurally, the essay is presented as all one paragraph, with no attention to breaking down ideas. The student does not provide direct quotations from the text, choosing instead to paraphrase with parenthetical citation. This is acceptable, but does not give evidence of close reading, nor does it demonstrate an ability to cite actual lines to make a case. Also, the student chooses the witch Circe as his second example of divine intervention; although she is divine, her interaction with Odysseus and his men is distinctly different from the intervention of the Olympian gods, and the student does not acknowledge the distinctions. The student does speculate about what this tells us about Greek attitudes towards the divine, but
tends towards generalization in this passage. This essay was graded by a GTA, who makes notes of the deductions (-.5 for argument (a) and -.5 for style (s)) but does not mark examples of these weaknesses in the body of the paper itself. This makes it difficult for both student and evaluator to link the deductions to specific errors.

(9/10) This paper “checks all the boxes” on the rubric, but is not a strong piece of writing. The style is awkward (see phrasing of sentence 2) and there are typos (“in form of” for “in front of” in sentence 2; “bare him clothing and food” for “bear” in sentence 4). The student uses one paraphrase and one direct quotation for evidence, but the second example is not relevant to the argument. The student cites Alcinous, a mortal, speaking to Odysseus, and this does not support her case about divine intervention. At the end of paragraph 2, the student alludes to another example of the goddess Athena assisting Odysseus, which is an example of divine intervention, but is redundant with the first example (also of Athena’s aid to Odysseus). Thus both of the student’s examples end up illustrating the same type of intervention by the same goddess. The student’s comparison of the two instances hits upon something interesting (the differing roles of disguise placed upon Odysseus by Athena), but does not develop the idea coherently. Furthermore, the concluding statement about the Greek attitudes toward the role of the gods in the lives of mortals is non-sensical (that the intervention of the gods “depends upon the journey they (mortals) seek and how they choose to set forth at it”). This sentence shows little evidence of having thought about the question. This work was graded by a GTA, who notes deduction of -1 for argument, but does not elaborate upon the evidence for this deduction.