

Final Project, Option 1
Standard Academic Paper

Due: May 5, 2014

Unlike Essays 1-5, the topic and scope of this 5-7 page essay are almost entirely at your discretion, so long as they relate in some substantial way to Shakespeare's plays and follows the conventions of academic papers. Also unlike Essays 1-5, this essay asks that you perform and integrate into your paper some research on your chosen topic. Your overall goal in this essay is to address your topic in such a way that you contribute to the scholarly conversation about it.

Still interpretation: Despite these differences, this essay is similar to Essays 1 & 5 in that it should contain a strong, argumentative and interpretive thesis, along with strong subordinate claims backed by textual evidence and appropriate supporting historical, linguistic, or cultural evidence. The paper should, in other words, be a *close reading* at heart: an interpretation constructed from analysis of information.

Topic: Choose a topic that befits the length of the essay. Instead of a very broad topic like "the role of marriage in Shakespeare's plays," you should approach specific questions and issues (e.g., the role of marriage in *The Winter's Tale*). But as you know, it is not enough simply to point out that a given topic (be it a concept, such as marriage, or something play-specific, like a character) "plays a role." You must describe *how* it plays a role and *the significance to our understanding of the play* of the role that topic plays. Even when (or *especially* when) taking up thematic or ideological topics, you need to work closely with the textual evidence the play provides.

Narrowing it down: Feel free to think in- or outside the box as you choose a topic. You might want to write about a single question in a single play, or you might want to compare how two plays represent the same idea. You might want to write on Shakespeare's relationship to another early modern text (e.g., *Hamlet* and Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*) or a particular historical phenomenon as it gets represented in a Shakespeare play. You might write on specific textual cruxes, such as the alternate "To be or not to be" speech in *Hamlet*. The sky is truly the limit, though you must of course get approval from me. **You must submit your topic for my approval by April 23rd.** I realize that topics sometimes change, especially as we read the final three plays, so of course this topic choice is preliminary.

Scholarship: An important step in writing your paper is to gather a few secondary texts on your topic—enough to give you a sense of the scholarly conversation about it. Your paper should contribute to (or otherwise intervene in) that conversation. Of course, a handful of sources will not give you mastery over the topic's scholarship, but it will suffice to give your essay a rhetorical situation to which to speak. Make your claim with respect to what others have said, whether you are disagreeing with another scholar's argument, corroborating it with additional information, modifying it, or taking it further. (This is, in miniature, what scholars do.) The KU libraries have huge resources for finding secondary materials. The best places to start are electronic databases (especially the MLA bibliography, JSTOR, and Project Muse) and the library catalog. Bevington's edition is also invaluable, because it contains a huge bibliography sorted by topic and play. **You must draw on and cite at least three peer-reviewed scholarly sources.**

Thesis: A strong thesis will place the paper in contact with other scholars even as it articulates your main claim. Often the best (and easiest) way to include both components is to build it into the structure of the main thesis sentence. For example: "While Scholar X claims that Hamlet's crisis of conscience is largely self-promoted, I argue that his material and religious circumstances produce an unresponsive conscience rather than one in crisis." Or: "Most critics who take up the question of sovereignty in *Henry V* use a vocabulary that the play rejects, and that rejection, I argue, constitutes the play's chief dramatic force." Or: "Although Scholar Y rightly describes *As You Like It* as 'Shakespeare's most playful comedy,' much of that playfulness derives from a pseudo-religious repression of serious themes and questions."

A note on cultural and historical evidence: make a point to avoid *with excited fastidiousness* using generalizations about Shakespeare's time and culture to make your argument. If you find yourself writing something like "people in Shakespeare's time believed...", you are making a generalization, but more importantly you are letting that generalization think for you. If you want to use broad-based statements to make a point—such as "Shakespeare's audience would have known what to expect at the end of *Henry V*"—you must find resources that demonstrate that fact.

A very successful paper will:

- be properly formatted
- be free of grammatical errors and stylistic unclarity
- address the central questions of the assignment clearly and cogently
- have a strong, clear thesis that unifies the paper
- be thoughtfully organized into a paragraph structure that most persuasively articulates the paper's argument
- have paragraphs that contain discernible topics, transitions, and a cogent structure
- marshal appropriate evidence and analysis to advance the thesis
- cite all sources appropriately

Format: the essay should be between 5-7 pages long and should follow MLA formatting guidelines. If you are not familiar with MLA formatting, see me. Late papers will not be accepted. **Do not hesitate to contact me with questions or problems—especially in the early stages of writing, when you are choosing and researching a topic. Past students have described paper consultations with me as "life-changing," "so good my face melted," and "very helpful."**