

Research Paper

The research paper for this course is a historical survey of criticism on a particular text, author, theme, or genre. While I do not expect these papers to be definitive or exhaustive (they need not cover everything written on given topic), I do expect them to be representative of the traditional/ canonical interpretations. You might think of this assignment in the context of teaching: imagine that you were suddenly told you had to teach a given topic and you knew very little about it. What you want to produce is a guide to the basic sources anyone would have to read in order to teach a responsible class on the subject -- the classic articles, the ones everybody quotes from and refers to.

Your research should enable you to do the following:

- Catalogue the major critical perspectives used on this work in broad chronological order. (Did criticism start out New Critical in the 40's and 50's, then go through a brief psychoanalytic phase in the 60's, turn feminist in the 70's, and then get Marxist or post-Structuralist in the 80's and 90's?)
- Identify the major scholars of repute on you author or work
- Identify the major journals which publish on your author or work.

In the case of topics on which there is a plethora of sources, you may choose to deal with one or two critical cruxes -- particular issues in criticism.

Because topics vary so widely in the amount and kind of criticism available, I am reluctant to make too rigid an assignment about length. These papers should be at least 8 pages (typed, double-space) and should not be more than 15 pages long, not including your annotated bibliography. (Another reason for flexibility in length is that some people may have fairly long, elaborate bibliographies and short papers while others may prefer to make their biblios short and their papers long.) You should have looked at/skimmed between 20 and 30 sources, read carefully and annotated between 12 and 20, and actually use 8-10 in your final paper.

Students who wish to put their final project on the web may focus more on their annotated bibliographies, writing slightly shorter research papers.

There is a sample student website on the feminist critic Rachel Blau duPlessis at <http://people.clemson.edu/~alitchf/RBD1.htm>

And another on Amy Tan at:
http://members.aol.com/vicbeck/Tan_Overview.html

Remember: This paper is different from those you have written in other English classes: this is a class in Literary Criticism, so your paper is about critical approaches to the work, not the work itself; not a paper on The Scarlet Letter but a paper on what critics have said about The Scarlet Letter.