

English 100/101A

Assignment: Research Essay
Texts: Self-selected single-author, book-length work of nonfiction and selected research sources
Essay Length: **6-8 full pages (6 pages minimum) (not including the annotated works cited list you will attach to the final version)**

Welcome to the final research paper, a critical and comparative analysis of a single work you'll select on your own.

The writing assignment itself is quite similar to that of your earlier papers: choose a narrowly defined writing strategy or set of related writing strategies within your chosen reading and describe and analyze them by evaluating their function and effectiveness as communicative techniques. Another way of saying it: choose a suitably narrow set of rhetorical elements and use them as your "lens" with which to examine the reading you've selected. Your purpose and goal is to explain why you think *the writing* is good or bad, compelling, effectively built, challenging, unconventional, etc. or not, and why you think so. What do you see in the way the thing is written that leads you to believe it's good or bad writing? What specific writing strategies and rhetorical choices made in the work can you point to that help you argue that it's good or bad writing, or something in between?

As you open your essay discussion, remember to *briefly* introduce and summarize the reading for us *before* you actually begin your analysis so that we'll have a context for your thesis arguments, since you'll have to assume that we have not read the primary work you'll be examining. As always, you'll need a thesis statement too, one in which you offer your evaluation of the effectiveness or significance of a specific strategy or set of strategies, effects, or authorial intention(s) in the work. I'm asking you to *evaluate* the strength of the writing remember, not just report on what something is or isn't about; I want to know what you think about the writing itself, how well or not well it's composed and why you think so based on your close look at just a few key strategies the writer uses.

But this assignment is also about making critical connections with other texts – that's the research component of the assignment. You'll need to search out other kinds of writing and cultural production (books, essays and articles, websites, films and videos, poems and music) that **address the same core topic(s) as in your book *but in different ways from your book***, ways that will help you better see and explain to us what makes the ways in which your book discusses its topics so unique and compelling, or not. You're looking for researched sources that are comparable to your book only in the sense that they're composed about the same subjects, that's all.

For example, you could choose as your core text the book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* in which the writer discusses in Zen Buddhist terms how to fix a motorcycle – a very unconventional way of writing about motorcycles all on its own, right? Now your task is to go out and find other people talking about motorcycles and/or Zen Buddhism too, but in different ways. So you might pick up a Zen teaching text, or you might go watch the iconic film *Easy Rider* about a 60s counterculture drug infused motorcycle (Harley) ride across America, or you might find a rap song about fast motorcycles, or you might find a website about the principals of Zen Buddhist practice. Your task now is to use those sources that you found to help you better explain to us what's so good or not good, unique or not unique, interesting or not, about how your book deals with those same subjects: Zen and motorcycle maintenance. I want you looking for the main theme and subjects in your book, then going out into the world to find other voices dealing with those same themes or subjects, but differently, with greater or lesser success. You'll be making connections between your primary text and a larger world of comparable "texts" out there, and using them to better elucidate and evaluate what you see in your primary text.

Recall from your last assignment that "comparable" does not mean "the same." You should be looking for ways to find your book and your researched sources similar or the same in some manner, but also as unique and different while at the same time still noting how they share common features or emphases. The point is for us to understand better how well or not well your primary work is written, and one of the ways you'll be explaining that to us is by pointing to other works kinds of writing or artistic production, showing us how those research sources approach the same topics in different ways that help to further illuminate the strengths or weaknesses of your

primary text. Use your sources to better, more fully explain where your primary text succeeds and/or fails in its own writing strategies. As always, cite specific examples from each of those other texts to support your analysis — this essay will again collapse very quickly if you do not support your points with textual references every time. And remember to use the **sample student essays** provided in the course to help you formulate the structure for this essay.

Again, keep in mind once more that I am *not* asking you to weigh in on the subject matter of your chosen primary reading: I do not want to know your own position or opinion of the ideas expressed in the text. This isn't a history paper or a cultural critique, remember: you may of course discuss relevant issues of race and class, sex and gender, politics and history, art and industry, religion and philosophy, culture and community, etc. as those relate to your critical textual examination of writing form and strategy in your analysis, but the focus of the assignment should be, as always, to look at *the writing* – the form, the strategies, the rhetorical choices a writer makes in how she/he talks to us – to examine your chosen selection up close in order to discover how and how well the author conveys meaning in the work.

Note that for this assignment I'm specifically requiring you to integrate **a minimum of 5 research sources** into your essay, and each source needs to be a different type, and one each of the following: **a book; an essay or article; a website; a film or video; a poem or song**. You may use other resource sources as well, ones that duplicate some of these types or are different types not listed here, but at minimum you must be actively using in your essay writing one each of those five types I've listed in order to be considered for credit for this essay assignment. This research component is described more thoroughly below.

So again, there are two additional elements to this assignment: research, and an annotated works cited list. Each is described below:

1. A significant component of this assignment is researching how others write and talk about the same or similar topics in different ways and then integrating those findings and discoveries into your own set of thesis claims and arguments about how well or not well your primary text is written and built. So, in addition to exploring your selection from the book, you will need to cite **a minimum of 5 research sources** that somehow relate or connect or speak to the subjects, themes or styles used and covered in your chosen reading selection. These sources may be drawn from a wide array of search databases and search results. They may be digital or hard copy: print publications accessed via a Webtool search, or *legitimate and credibly authored* web-based sources found through those same Webtool searches. Please note though that **dictionary sites, Wikipedia, and similar general online research sites are NOT acceptable sources to satisfy this required component of the assignment**. You may reference these sources in your essay if you wish, but they may not be counted toward your **5** required research sources. Ask me if you are not sure whether or not a given source that you've found is considered legitimately and credible enough such that you could use it as support in your essay. "Legitimate and credible" sources in this assignment context are sources whose authors are speaking from direct knowledge and experience with their subjects such that they can be seen as believable, credibly so, about those subjects.

In integrating your sources into your analysis, you will still be using them to support your own thesis evaluation of the writing in your primary text. Use the research texts just as you use textual references from your primary text: to help you explain and analyze how those rhetorical elements (the ones you have chosen to focus on in your thesis formulation) work and why they are so significant. But remember not to let any of your texts speak *for* you: *you* must generate the ideas, and *they* must support *you* — not the other way around. Remember also to fully introduce the research sources before you integrate them, just as you introduce your chosen primary reading selection before discussing it. You may use the summary abstracts you create for your annotated works cited lists to help you with this introductory work, of course. Look at the sample essays I've provided to see how to integrate research sources into your own analysis effectively.

2. Finally, for this essay you will also need to prepare an **annotated works cited** list that follows the MLA format you learned in the lesson materials on works cited lists earlier in the term. This final *annotated* works cited list must include at least **6 separate entries** on it: your primary work, and your 5 required research sources (a book; an essay or article; a website; a film or video; a poem or song). Please make sure that you are actually using (by direct, page cited quoted or paraphrased references in your discussion) in your essay each of the sources that you include and annotate on this final list.

Please note once more that this final list must include **a minimum of 6 entries: 1 annotated entry** for your primary reading selection AND a minimum of 5 research sources. **It must also be an annotated list, not a standard list: each entry must be summarized in 3-4 sentences directly below the entry.** And the list must be **formatted correctly**, with appropriate spacing, tabbing, punctuation, and included citation information. If these requirements are not met, the essay as a whole will not be read and will receive a 0 in the grade book – please make sure you spend time on this portion of your final paper to ensure that it gets done completely and correctly.

Allow plenty of time to proofread your work, and think about getting someone else's help: others can often see language and organization problems more easily than you can. There should be no sentence fragments or errors in noun-pronoun or subject-verb agreement. Write your essay in 3rd person present tense throughout, without contractions or slang speech, and format it the same as all of your other formal work. Please note that thorough, painstaking proofreading of this essay is *extremely* important: since there are no rewrite opportunities this time (the essay is due on the last day of the term), incomplete or poorly proofread work is a "deal breaker" that will force me to fail the work.

As always, I will be looking for you to show competence in these areas:

1. Good grammatical control of your sentences *and* a narrow, focused thesis argument
2. Body paragraphs that offer lots of discussion and analysis *and* lots of textual examples that support each new point you make
3. A clear description of what you think is important or significant in the formal structure and design of the reading selection you've chosen to analyze, and a clear explanation of the devices and strategies you think the writer uses to help her/him say those things
4. Your evaluation of the significance or effectiveness of those writing strategies
5. Good integration of research source materials into your analysis

Remember:

- Fully introduce and summarize your primary reading selection *before* you begin your analysis of it
- Be specific in your argumentation: Develop a sound thesis argument in your first paragraph that revolves around a single important point you wish to make *about the writing (not the ideas)*
- Use lots of **textual evidence** to support your discussion – body paragraphs that do not offer direct or paraphrased textual support will not be credited toward your required page total
- Develop your body paragraphs by announcing a single supporting point, then by introducing and inserting a textual quotation to provide evidence of your point, then by explaining and discussing that evidence and tying it back to the main point of your paragraph
- Cite your textual quotations or paraphrased material with a page number in parentheses after the citation, and follow all other formatting guidelines outlined elsewhere in the course materials on integrating quotations and referencing sources correctly

- Use appropriate academic language: Write only in the **present tense**, even when speaking of a text that has been written in the past: write “the author **says**,” NOT “the author **said**”
- Use appropriate academic language: Write only in the **3rd person** (use: he, she, it, they, the authors, the reader, etc.). **DO NOT use me, I, you, or your anywhere in your essay – submissions that do not follow this rule will be not be read and marked as a 0 in the grade book**

Please remember that as this paper is submitted during finals week, you will not have the option to rewrite it – this essay must be right the first time around to prevent a below passing mark which will prevent you from passing the course. This essay is worth double the usual points – 40 instead of 20, and it counts toward the Research Skills category of your course grade, a category which must be a 70% or better to pass the course. Take this essay very seriously, and get started on it as early as possible. You are welcome at any stage in your writing process up until the early draft deadline listed elsewhere in the course to email me unfinished drafts of your work for my comments and feedback, which I am happy to provide.

Good luck. Be sure to choose a primary reading understand and are truly interested in — this will make for an easier paper assignment and a *much* more compelling analysis. I’m looking for honest, well-considered and well-supported analysis that tells me something real about the style and structure and communicative success of the things you read, how they work on their own and how they work in connection with other related texts you find out in the real world.