

**Writing Papers for Honors 2101**  
Prof. Benham

For this course you will be writing three short papers (~5 pages, double-spaced, 10 or 12 point font, 1" margins, etc.). These papers will cover a number of different topics and themes (see suggested paper topics provided), but they should all conform to the general standards of any good paper. Below are some recommendations. Please note that I am happy to read rough drafts of your paper, but you must allow adequate time for this, e.g., two or three days turn around time, or make an appointment to discuss specific questions you may have.

1. **General Comments:** The basic goal of the paper should be to demonstrate that you have a clear grasp of the subject matter you are discussing. It should reflect your understanding and appreciation of the work or some theme. So, please let your words do the representing. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. There is no expectation that you do any research in outside sources, but it is not discouraged. If quotes are necessary, please document them appropriately. Also, the paper should be presented without grammatical or spelling errors. It should have a beginning, middle and end, which correspond to an introduction, body and conclusion of the paper.
  
2. **Specific Considerations:**
  - a. Your paper must have a clearly stated and focused thesis. Think of your thesis as an answer to a question about the texts or some theme exhibited in the materials covered in the course. What is it that you are writing about? What question or set of questions will you be asking and answering?
  
  - b. Use specific passages, episodes, or scenes from the literature to illustrate or support your thesis. This demonstrates familiarity with the material. Think of examples that best demonstrate the point you are making and use them to convince the reader. However, you shouldn't over do it; the use of examples is not a substitute for your own thoughts about the subject. Also, use of examples from the texts are not always unambiguous; you may need to provide some interpretation or explanation for how the example fits in with the point(s) you are making.
  
  - c. The paper should be clearly organized. I recommend using paragraphs as your primary unit of organization. For example, your first paragraph should have a clear statement of your thesis and a summary of your supporting reasons. In the body of the paper, use one paragraph to explain or illustrate one point at a time. Additional paragraphs can be used to explain or support other points. In short, make sure you write in a logical manner so that ideas flow smoothly from one to the other. Think of your paper as providing a road-map of your ideas. It should be organized so that the reader can follow it with little or no trouble.
  
  - d. Use clear, concrete, specific and straightforward language in your paper. Define and clarify important terms or concepts. You don't have to use fancy or important sounding language to convey important ideas. Remember, you are trying to inform the reader. You are not trying to confuse the reader.

3. Grading Criteria: Papers are evaluated on a number of different criteria. The following are the two most important criteria:
- a. Content: By far the most important criterion is the content of your paper. Your paper should reflect a clearly articulated and well thought out paper that demonstrates your understanding the theme you are writing on. You should also demonstrate that you understand the consequences and implications of your thesis beyond the narrow confines of the paper topic. If you are not sure about these make an appointment and we can discuss your paper.
  - b. Grammar and Organization: The next most important criterion is that your paper is clearly organized and uses grammatically correct language. I don't expect absolute grammatical perfection, but the more mistakes there are the more difficult it is for your paper to earn a high grade. I suggest reading the paper out loud, word for word. If it doesn't sound right, it probably isn't. Several good reference works are available to help in this regard. Don't be afraid to use them. Also, using a spell-check program does not constitute sufficient editorial review. Give yourself time to write and re-write your paper several times.
  - c. Sample Grading Rubric: Before turning in you final draft of the paper, ask you self the following questions. Ultimately, each question should be answered with an unequivocal Yes.
    - o Does the paper have a clear and focused thesis?
    - o Is the thesis adequately supported or illustrated by several examples?
    - o Does the paper have an identifiable structure that logically supports the thesis?
    - o Does the paper make use of clear and concrete language to articulate the ideas of expressed in the paper?
    - o Does the paper employ proper spelling and grammar?
4. Letter Grades: a brief explanation of what I take the letter grades to mean. These remarks should not be taken as strict criteria. They only provide a guideline for what I expect.

A = the paper demonstrates that the student really understands the issue, provides a grammatically flawless paper, and makes no obvious mistakes. Also an "A" paper generally adds some originality by extending the ideas of the paper to other areas, demonstrating some novelty and critical reflection.

B = the paper demonstrates a clear understanding of the issue, provides a grammatically sound paper (very few errors), and makes no major mistakes.

C = the student demonstrates a basic understanding of the issue (with one or two minor mistakes), provides a grammatical paper with only a handful of errors, and makes minor errors.

D = the paper demonstrates some understanding but is generally confused, provides a grammatically weak paper with several errors that impede the reader from understanding the ideas in the paper, and makes a number of general errors.

F = the paper demonstrates little more than confusion about the issue, provides a very weak grammatical paper with numerous grammatical errors, and makes a number of clear errors.