

## WRITING A RESEARCH PAPER

The paper will examine some aspect of contemporary American fiction that interests you. Preferably, it will focus on one (or two or three) of the works we have studied. You may also discuss an author whose work we have not looked at but who is in some way connected to the issues we have covered. You may analyze the use of imagery, sources, style; you may read the text critically through one approach or another; you may compare the printed work with a film version. Nevertheless, whatever you choose to write about, your essay should be more than a review of literature. It should be your own idea, supported by other critics as you find appropriate. You are encouraged to draw on the themes that emerged (and re-emerged) in the course of the semester.

### The research process

1. Re-read carefully the work or section of a work you intend to explore. You may have an inkling of an idea as you re-read; if not, look for some aspect you want to analyze. When you have arrived at an idea and a way of approaching it, jot down a paragraph outlining your idea and stating your provisional thesis for the intended paper.
2. Look for critical essays about the work or author, depending on your focus. In some cases, you may have to use book reviews. Look for recent articles and work your way backwards.
3. Construct a working bibliography. What works may be helpful? What essays will you need to take a look at since the title does not provide enough information? Can you rule out some entirely? Make a working list.
4. Take notes on the parts of the essay which discuss what you're interested in. Be able to put things into your own words, not just quote another author.  
Most importantly: Do not lose sight of your own idea as you read other critics; remember, you are to use them as support, not as a substitute for your own thinking.
5. You may find it productive to review the primary text occasionally; you will probably receive further insights as you do so.

**When you sit down to write**, consider the following parameters:

- a. Thesis. Your paper should state a clear thesis or main argument.
- b. Support. Your paper should support that idea with arguments based on logic, evidence from the primary text, and examples from pertinent scholarship.
- c. Citations. Do not give a plot summary, but do refer to incidents or evidence from the text that support your view. Connect all citations to your own sentences, but do not overquote. Quote only those words that directly support your point. Reviewing pertinent scholarship is important, but your ability to analyze and apply it is even more important.
- d. Introduction. Your introductory paragraph should (a) mention the author(s) and the title(s) you analyze, (b) say something to make readers want to read on, (c) state your thesis, and (d) indicate how you will organize the evidence supporting your thesis.

My primary interest in assigning this paper is that you write an essay providing an original insight into some aspect of contemporary fiction. An "A" paper will contain, along with the original insight, a clear, easy-to-read style, logical organization, and generous citations from and references to the text as you develop your argument. A successful paper should also demonstrate that you have consulted critical commentary on your topic and that you are able to integrate information from secondary sources into your argumentation. Finally, it should use the conventions of the MLA style correctly.