

Topics for paper #1: minimum of 7 pages
Due Thurs. 10/4, in class

GUIDELINES ON FORMAT for all papers in this class (retain for future reference):

- 1) Attach a cover sheet to your essay giving a title (a good one), your name, and a signed pledge that the paper is entirely your own work. You should not need to consult any outside sources, just your memory and notes. Now would be the time to review the section on Plagiarism on the class syllabus.
- 2) Double space and use a size-12 Courier (or Courier New) font, with margins of about 1 inch. Quotations of longer than 5 lines should be set in on both sides and should be double-spaced. They do NOT need quotation marks around them (the setting-in indicates that it's a quotation).
- 3) Number your pages. The cover page should not be numbered. By convention the first page of your text should not *show* a number, although it is counted as page 1; the next page should show 2, and so on.
- 4) Staple the pages in the correct order. Yes, past experience tells me I have to specify this.
- 5) When you quote, follow your quotation with a parenthetical citation giving the work's name (the first time; after that, if you're quoting only one work, it's not necessary) and the page number. You don't need footnotes or endnotes, or a "Works Cited" list or bibliography. When you are quoting from a work divided into separate books and marked with line numbers, give the book and line numbers as well, after the page number (for example: *Odyssey*, p. 222, Book XIV, lines 66-68).

ADVICE for all papers written for this class:

- 1) Don't assume that you can't use the first-person voice. "I think" or "it seems to me" is OK, as long as you have reasons to back up what you think. I'd rather have you sound like a distinct individual than an impersonal bureaucratic committee.
- 2) Quote from and/or paraphrase portions of the text to support your claims as much as possible. Unlike experimental scientists, who seek to arrive at knowledge by eliminating variables and narrowing the field of possibilities, we in the humanities are looking for responses that seek to take in *more*, that don't just identify an issue of importance but attempt to see how it plays out in a variety of different settings in a literary work or historical context. Don't think of your task as one of arriving at the tersest statement of a book's "meaning"; think of it as one of engaging with some issue raised by the book in sufficiently satisfying detail.

- 3) Don't assume that your essay has to conform to some ideal model of the 5-paragraph essay (opening paragraph, 3 paragraphs of "body," closing paragraph). Rather than helpfully providing a structure, this model can become a cage, and it encourages a boredom-inducing level of repetition (here's what I will say, here I am saying it, here's what I have said). You want to persuade your readers, not hit them over the head.
- 4) Don't write for the professor. Write for an imaginary reader who is somewhat familiar with the text you're discussing but needs some reminding about what happens when and so forth. When you discuss a particular passage or incident in the text, make sure to contextualize it for this imaginary reader. When you move from one part of the text to another, help the reader move with you by providing a sufficient transition. Explain any foreign-language terms (e.g. *biotos*, etc.). Always be asking yourself if what you're saying will be clear and persuasive to the imaginary reader.
- 5) Keep your opening paragraph focused on the specific claim your paper is making. Don't begin with vast generalizations (e.g. "Throughout the history of Western literature") when your real subject is something specific about a particular text.
- 6) People often think that academic writing is unlike the kind of writing they might need to do in the "real world." But one way in which the writing in this class is *exactly* like the writing you might do in a professional context is that it is being read by someone busy who has a lot of other things to read and who will hold you responsible for what you present.

Possible topics for paper #1: choose one.

1. Explain what it means to say that a central theme of the *Odyssey* is the conflict between Poseidon and Athena. Make sure to consider, along with other things, Athena's behavior at the beginning of book 3 and what difference that makes to our sense of this conflict. Is it a conflict that is likely to end in one side's victory? How does Teiresias's description, in Book XI, of the final journey that Odysseus will have to make help us answer this question?
2. Write about the significance of Odysseus's trick of naming himself "Nobody" in his encounter with the Cyclops. By "significance" I do not mean simply "what that trick leads to in the Cyclops encounter itself," but what it suggests about all of Odysseus's adventures in books 9-12 and the epic as a whole. How does the encounter with the Cyclops offer a prototype for all of Odysseus's adventures in attempting to get home? Separate out the various important elements of the encounter that help establish it as prototype.
3. Write about the ways in which the *Odyssey* exhibits an ancient people's tendency to "externalize" things (like ambivalence, guilt, remorse, recklessness, etc.) that we modern folks would tend to represent by reference to "internal" individual psychology. What might this tendency have to do with the oral origins of Homer's epic?