

Summary: 16-20 pp., due SES#26.

This last paper should be 16-20 pages, and is due on the last day of class. We'll devote the week of 5/5-7 to presentations of your topics and work in progress, with a view to problem-solving and providing useful feedback. The overall grade for the seminar paper (out of 100) will include 10 points each for timely completion of a substantive proposal and a rough draft.

Suggestions for how to proceed:

1. Begin by 1/ deciding which parts of which text(s) appeal to you most, and then find a topic or question to pursue; or 2/ formulating a question which interests you, and then decide which texts would best serve to pose and answer it. In either case, you should end up with some idea of a **question** and some idea of which (e.g.) **poems, scenes, characters, plot threads or passages** you'll be examining. I'd expect you to get about this far in your proposal, which should also include at least 3 secondary sources you plan to consult.
2. Next, you might either 1/ do some close readings of your passages, and think about the kinds of topics or questions which are emerging, the patterns being formed by the interpretations you're generating; or 2/ think about how to pursue your topic or question, and develop a provisional hypothesis about what you think may turn out to be the case, before going on to some readings of particular parts of the text or texts.
3. Think about how your close readings connect with a framing question, and how they can be organized to bring out an argument or exposition; recalibrate your hypothesis, perhaps even your question, in the light of the closer readings you've now done of your texts. At this stage, I strongly recommend writing an outline of your existing draft, summing up the point of each paragraph in a phrase or sentence; doing this will help you a/ to make sure you *are* making points; b/ to eliminate repetition; more importantly, c/ to see the skeletal shape of the argument, and consider whether that shape can be made clearer, whether it would benefit from putting your materials in a different order, and whether there are materials you need to add or subtract. For an example of a short essay with adjacent outline, see "Knowing Lucy" (the Lucy in question is from a Wordsworth poem, not from the Narnia books).
4. In your conclusion, recall the original question and the stages by which you've asked and answered it; don't have recourse to generalities, but remind the reader of the most interesting things you've discovered and argued – brief quotations (e.g., phrases rather than ten-line chunks) aren't out of place here to recall the flavor of the works you're talking about. This last piece of the paper would also be the place to include other ideas, conclusions or even questions you've come up with that don't quite fit into your topic, or which you didn't anticipate – even if you don't have time to explore them fully.
5. You can win or lose a reader in the last few sentences of your paper. Here are three rhetorically effective things to do at the *very* end: 1/ restate your main point first with some detail and complexity, and then in the most succinct and lapidary prose (see example A below for what I mean by the second); 2/ suggest another question which arises from the work you've done in the paper, and would form the subject of a hypothetical companion

essay (see example B); 3/ introduce a quote from one of the works which can now, in the light of your essay, be seen as perfectly exemplifying the points you've made (see example C).

Here are examples of the three strategies for conclusion described above (taken from another Renaissance poetry seminar):

Example A: "Has there ever been a gay Shakespeare? Yes – and his name *is* Shakespeare" (Eve Sedgwick).

Example B: "What I've said about Shakespeare's *Sonnets* suggests that we would best understand his poems to the young man by reading them not only in the context of Petrarchan love poetry, but also against other poems written by men to men – for instance, the many elegies on the death of Philip Sidney which praised him as an ideal. But that would be the subject of another essay."

Example C: [Your argument here] [two lines from the *Sonnets* here].

6. Finally, make sure you've allowed time to proofread your essay and take care of any leftover formatting. For reference format, please see "Sample Bibliography"; for other questions, please see "How to Format Your Paper."

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