

Final Paper

Final Paper Assignment

For your final assignment, you will write a documented paper—with a standard, MLA, works-cited page—of no less than eight complete pages. The point of such a paper is to demonstrate that you have been thinking about gothic fiction for 14 weeks. As part of the paper, you will first produce a brief, one-paragraph description or prospectus of your project that I will comment on. It is due by (about) 17 April. In all, your final paper will read *Dracula* closely and in dialogue with scholars of gothic fiction. Thus you will test your ideas against theirs and, I trust, will enrich both.

Because the semester is winding down, and because you are burdened by other classes, how you manage your time will have a big impact on whether your paper is successful. So begin the process now. Start a file on your computer. Sketch out an idea or focus. Choose an aspect of *Dracula* that interests you. Start thinking about a method. We've been introduced to feminist criticism, gender criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, and close reading. Obviously, close reading will be a part of each paper. Email me with what you've found. I'll keep you focused.

The best topics or ideas are ones that readers care about. When I write a research paper, I determine what either interests or puzzles me in a text and write about that. I also look for problems—i.e., occurrences that require explanation—and patterns in either characterization or plot. For example, the treatment of women in gothic fiction, inside and outside of the domestic sphere, is a problem that has caught our attention. The pattern that problem takes is quite complicated in *Dracula*. One New Woman (Lucy) is punished for her desires by dying twice and the other (Mina) is vamped and yet idealized. Which of these two women are readers to admire? Which of their experiences—becoming suddenly sexual or contributing to the pursuit of Dracula—are we to model ourselves after? Similarly, women do not reproduce during the book as such; only Dracula does. He not only reproduces *others*, he reproduces himself in a process known as autogenesis. Inquiring readers might also want to know why men in *Frankenstein* and “Rappaccini’s Daughter” create unnatural life forms. I’ll bite: what does that say about how they feel about real women, desire, marriage, sexuality, and reproduction? Each of those topics would make for a good paper (but not all of them at once).

If you begin early and choose a topic that interests you, you’ve made a good start. Now review your notes. Bring questions about them to class. Review the weekly recaps on Canvas, since they define (and repeat) our class’ core ideas. Read *Dracula* with the idea that concerns you in mind. Look for the ways in which that idea is patterned. Again, think back to the critical essays we’ve read on gender, feminism, and psychoanalysis, and look ahead to the essay on narrative. Determine what ideas from those essays help you to better understand your topic. Learn from how those authors use ideas and interpret texts. Indeed, it helps to model your language after how scholars do interpretations.

Now let’s turn to the research part of a documented paper. Our *Dracula* textbook has a “Criticism” section with seven scholarly essays. The essays have ideas that you can cite and build upon. I will also

section with seven scholarly essays. The essays have ideas that you can cite and build upon. I will also put a series of materials on reserve for you. Start with either the criticism section or the materials on reserve. You might look also at the bibliographies attached to the books we've read for class. See if any of their entries fit your project. Find the sources and, if they work, xerox them. Go to our library and use Google Scholar or a similar search engine to understand how others have approached the idea that is at the heart of your paper. Take careful notes, including all bibliographic information, and cite at least four different sources in the paper. That's a requirement for this assignment. But remember: you don't have to do research, as such; it's been done for you in our text's essays and in Canvas postings. Using them will save you time.

Your final paper should be an in-depth look at a *particular* idea and how it impacts *Dracula*. Avoid the trap of writing about more than one key idea (although some overlap of ideas is inevitable). Your goal is depth not breadth. The paper will have a critical methodology; an introduction that identifies your thesis; background paragraphs that situate your project; well-developed paragraphs that present evidence, in the form of quotations and analysis; and a logical conclusion that the paper has been building towards from the introduction. It will be spell-checked; it will also conform to MLA style, which you have learned about in English 108 (see *The Norton Field Guide*, our current handbook, for assistance). Finally and most crucially, it will demonstrate how much you have come to know about the excessive, critical, disturbing subject that is gothic fiction. In effect, your paper is our final exam as well.

Your drafts are due no later than 2 May. If you miss that deadline, I will read no more than your first two pages closely. Final papers are due in my P.O. box or under my office door by 5 p.m. on May 10. No late papers will be accepted.