

ENG 310 Final Project Instructions

The assignment, in brief: Choose any work of Renaissance literature or culture (philosophy, history, theology, etc.) that has not been assigned as part of this course. (Let “Renaissance” be defined for this purpose as 1300-1650 C.E.) Email me with your choice, so that I may assign that particular work to you and not permit other students to work on it. Write a paper totaling at least 7 pages (a breakdown of these pages into several sections is provided below).

Breakdown of the 7-page minimum: Your paper should consist of:

- A.) At least two pages introducing the work—Who wrote it? Under what circumstances? What is its genre? etc.—and summarizing it.
- B.) At least three pages discussing the work as a Renaissance text. How does it typify Renaissance thought? What themes from our course are present? How does the work develop those themes? Does the work seem to illustrate a grand narrative of the period, such as the Burckhardt thesis or the Baron thesis? What historical landmarks are relevant, e.g. the Reformation, the accession of Leo X, the death of Elizabeth I, etc.? Does the work prefigure or respond to any text that we have read in class?
- C.) At least two pages discussing any ways the work seems unique or atypical of its period. In other words, where do you think the influence of Renaissance culture ends and the individuality of the author begins? In what ways does this work seem unique, not like other Renaissance works of the same genre or subject matter? Does the work contradict any of the grand narratives of the period, such as the Burckhardt thesis or the Baron thesis?

Appropriate works to choose: Anything of substantial length (a book, a treatise, an essay, a long-form poem, a collection of poems, etc.) written between 1300 and 1650. If you want to choose something slightly outside those time parameters, let me know, and I’ll decide whether it’s appropriate.

- Examples of appropriate choices would include: Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Machiavelli’s *The Mandrake Root*, Ficino’s *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium*, the Erasmus-Luther debates on free will, Estienne de la Boetie’s *Voluntary Servitude*, Donne’s sermons, Ronsard’s *Franciade*, Emilia Lanier’s *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*...you get the idea.
- General categories of material—e.g., “Renaissance poetry by women,” “Protestant theology”—are **not** appropriate. Nor are short poems or other works of shorter length than I have typically included in the weekly readings.
- Don’t forget: it has to have been written between 1300 and 1650. I will negotiate these temporal boundaries on a case-by-case basis.

What about non-verbal “texts,” such as music or art? You may write about a work of art or music if and only if you have taken at least two college-level courses in art history or musicology. Otherwise, no. This rule is for your own good: art and music require special expertise to analyze learnedly, expertise that has not been taught in this class. I don’t want anyone choosing a work of music only to realize that they don’t have the vocabulary or background knowledge needed to talk about it. If you have a college-level background in art history or musicology, then you may write on any work created between 1300 and 1650, e.g. Lorenzo Ghiberti’s *Gates of Paradise*, Botticelli’s *Primavera*, Carlo Gesualdo’s *Tenebrae Responsoria*, Palestrina’s *Missa Papae Marcelli*, etc. The length and organization of such a paper should be the same as above.

What if you can’t think of anything? A good place to begin is by exploring the unassigned works of the authors we’ve read. Try reading the Wikipedia articles of some authors or works, and let your interests guide you to something appealing that you haven’t read yet.

What I’m looking for in your project: Finding a work to write on is an important part of the assignment. Life as a Renaissance scholar often means browsing libraries (or nowadays the internet) for obscure texts with foreign titles.

I want to see that you've undertaken this task, explored, found something, figured out on your own what it's about and what its historical context is, and related all of that to what you've learned in this course.

Reminder: Don't forget to email me once you've chosen something in order to reserve it for yourself. I am not allowing multiple students to work on the same text. This is to encourage adventurous exploration and to make sure everyone doesn't wind up working on the same few things. The sooner you contact me, the more likely it is that your desired text will still be available. The longer you wait, the more you risk being preempted by others.

Grading: Your paper will receive a letter grade based on: 1.) How well you've understood the work you've chosen, 2.) How accurately and thoroughly you are able to discuss your chosen work as a Renaissance text, 3.) How accurately and thoroughly you are able to recognize what is unique or unusual about your chosen text, and 4.) How well you write—e.g., how free is your paper of grammatical errors, how lucid is your expression, are your paragraphs structured well, etc.

A note about theses: Unlike most academic assignments, the present assignment does not require you to argue a thesis. That said, you may find yourself arguing a thesis in one or two sections of your paper, should you choose to focus on a specific way in which the work you're studying is or is not typical of Renaissance thought. For example, I can envision papers arguing that "*Hamlet* is typical of Renaissance culture in its depiction of academic skepticism," or "Montaigne's 'On Some Verses of Virgil' is atypical of Renaissance culture in its rejection of mind-matter dualism." But such theses are not required.

A note about research: This assignment does not require research (that is, beyond the task of finding something to write on and learning what it's about). You are welcome to do some research, and you may find it helpful to read what other people have said about your chosen text—but it isn't required. If you use secondary sources in your paper, be sure to cite them consistently in one of the standard formats (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.). Also do not allow your secondary sources to swallow up your own original thought. Even if sources are used, I still expect to see some analysis and ideas of your own.