English 701: Graduate Methodology

Talia Schaffer Wed. 6:30-8:20pm

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Required texts:

Wilde, Oscar. *The Importance of Being Earnest,* ed. Samuel Gladden*.* Broadview Press

978-1551116945

Turabian, Kate L., *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (Chicago, 8th edition) ISBN 978-0226816388

Additional resources:

Documents marked \* will be posted on Blackboard

The library has a special course guide for our class: please consult:

<http://qcpages.qc.cuny.edu/Library/research/guides/english/english701.php>

Learning Goals

In this course I hope you will:

• become comfortable performing scholarly research

• understand how criticism has changed over time, and how to identify and decode useful criticism

• develop workable strategies for composing, editing, and revising

• draft and develop a viable thesis

About this course:

When you sit down to write a thesis, what does that mean and how can you do it? This course will tell you. We’ll investigate which websites are reliable, discuss how to find useful on-line resources, and explore how to find the best printed articles and books. Not only will we learn how to find the right sources, we will also study how to read and use them properly. We’ll figure out what makes an article good (and how to tell if it’s good at a glance), and we’ll discuss how criticism has changed over the last few decades. You’ll work on your own research project, and also do some shorter assignments to learn how to use various research techniques. This course is designed to help you get ready to write your thesis.

Course Schedule

Jan 28 introduction: what and why do a thesis?

Turabian Part I, sections 1 and 2

# Case Study: Preparing to Research

Feb 4 Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*

**1. Notes on three previous papers**

Feb 11 Library session, room 225

**2. Response to previous comments**

Feb 18 NO CLASS – MON SCHEDULE

Feb 25 Starting research –in-class work

**3.** **Plan for revising paper**

# Evaluating Sources

Mar 4 \*Sample websites on Wilde

(Wikipedia, Shmoop, British Library, Victorian Web, Wilde)

Turabian Part I, Section 3

**4. Comment helpfully on two classmates’ revision plans**

Mar 11 \*Sample articles on *Importance of Being Earnest*

(Reinart, Mackie, Jackson, Cohen)

**5. Post annotated website on your topic**

Mar 18 \*Sample bios of Wilde

(Ellmann, Ch 22 p. 548-566)

(Hyde, pp. 368-375)

(McKenna, Croft-Cooke)

Turabian Part I, Section 4

**6. Post analysis of an article on your topic**

*Independent Research*

Mar 25 Distance reading: Moretti, Underwood, Best, Marcus

**7. Post analysis/comparison of bios of your author**

Apr 1 Private conferences – bring in action plan

**8. Post MLA list of articles for further research**

Apr 3-12 NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

Apr 15 Group work

**9. List qualities of articles you most admire**

Apr 22 Group work 2

Apr 29 Composing work: quoting, arguing, structuring the long paper

Editing work: revising, complicating, rethinking the long paper

Turabian Section 7

**10. Draft of paper**

*Finalizing the Paper*

May 6 In-class work on papers

Turabian Section 9, 10

**(Bring a revised draft)**

May 13 Final discussion

**Essay due with email address if you want feedback**

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Requirements:

Ten short assignments 40%

Essay 40%

Effort grade 20%

Effort grade (attendance, participation):

This grade rewards those who come to class regularly, participate, and put in the extra work needed to improve their skills. If you miss many classes without a valid excuse, do not participate, act uninterested in class, frequently come in late or leave early, or miss assignments, I may use this grade to adjust your overall course grade down.

Late papers/blog entries:

If you have a legitimate reason for needing an extension, contact me and set up a new deadline. I expect the paper to come in by that new date. If you do not get in touch with me, or if you do not meet the new deadline, your paper will drop by *one grade* for every day that it is late. Thus a paper which would normally get a B but is three days late drops three grades (B-, C+, C) and ends up a C.

Blogs

You need to post all 10 blog entries, answering the prompts above. Please remember that posts are due by Monday at 6:30. (They can, of course, be filed earlier.) This way the class and I will have a chance to read them before class on Wednesday. Blogs will be public, but I will grade and respond to them privately. A blog is an informal essay response, a paragraph to a page long.

You will get an A if you do full, satisfactory answers for all 10 blogs; an A- if you miss one; a B+ if you miss two; a B if you miss three, and so forth.

Blogs cannot be posted later. They expire Monday at 6:30. If you miss it that week, you have missed it.

The blog site is under “Discussion Board” in Blackboard. Log in through www.cuny.edu, with your QC id and password.

Other notes on writing

The OWL at Purdue is a great resource for help with MLA or Chicago reference style, grammar, citation, and other writing tips and problems. Their site can be found here: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>

Warning: Whenever you use ideas or words you read somewhere, give the reference right away! Presenting another person’s material as if it is your own constitutes plagiarism, and plagiarism is a serious offense. If you plagiarize once you will receive an “F” on your paper. If you plagiarize more than once you will fail the course. Give the source for everything, except for those facts that are common knowledge. CUNY’s policy on academic integrity is clear and available for you to read: <http://web.cuny.edu/academics/info-central/policies/academic-integrity.pdf>

Writing assignments must be produced on a computer.Always:

• Follow MLA guidelines for formatting your essays and citing sources.

• Use Times 12 or its close equivalent.

• Set your margins at 1” and don’t “justify” your right-hand margin.

• Use an automatic pagination function to number your pages.

• Proofread your writing for typographical, grammatical, and punctuation errors.

• Avoid computer disaster by regularly saving your work and periodically printing out drafts while you write.

Short assignments:

This is an unusual graduate class because most of the work you do here is independent research, rather than reading. We will be going through the steps of revising an essay or thesis, slowly and with lots of discussion and mutual help, so that you’ll feel confident with this process.

The ten short assignments are designed to help you become proficient at evaluating sources, looking at literary criticism as a fellow practitioner, and expanding your research opportunities. Each week, you will go out and perform your own short research exercise using the techniques we discussed in class the previous week and building cumulatively on earlier assignments.

We will also do a case study (Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*) so as to model how to set up and research a paper*.* Please note that you *may not use Earnest* for your paper. The point is for you to learn independent research skills – if you just ride off the class discussion, you aren’t practicing it yourself. The entire world of literature and culture is open to you with the sole exception of one play. You can find something else.

Here is an explanation of each of the assignments:

**1. Notes on three previous papers**

Think about three papers you’ve written in previous courses that might or might not be good candidates to expand into a thesis. Write a brief description of each, with an evaluation of why they would or wouldn’t make a good basis for a thesis. It’s ok if none of them seem viable – sometimes figuring out why something *won’t* work is valuable. If you don’t have enough papers, invent one that might work for a thesis and write a brief summary of what you think it might say.

**2. Response to previous comments**

If you have your professor’s comments on one of the papers you did in #1, summarize them and then write a response to them. You don’t have to do everything the professor suggested, but you do have to justify why you will or won’t do it. If you don’t have the comments, imagine that you are a professor and try to write your own set of comments. How would an outsider see this work? What might s/he suggest you change?

**3.** **Plan for revising paper**

Using the comments in #2, figure out what you need to do to turn this essay into a thesis. Write a brief set of instructions for yourself, listing what you need to revise, expand, investigate. If none of the three papers seems like a good model for a thesis, then you may use this class to write a new essay as the basis for a thesis; in that case, write a brief description of what this essay will be about, what you’ll be arguing, investigating, researching.

**4. Comment helpfully on two classmates’ fields of research**

Use what you’ve been learning in Turabian to help each other out. Post comments on two classmates’ Assignment #3s. These should be helpful comments designed to get your classmate to refine the topic into something easier to write on. Don’t just say that the topic is interesting – I am sure they will all be interesting – but actively help your classmate figure out a version of the topic that would make a good essay, and why. Make sure to give the classmates’ names in the subject line of your post.

**5. Post annotated website on your topic**

Following up on the website analysis we did in class, link to a website that seems relevant to your research and attach a page of analysis. Is it reputable, and how can you tell? How useful is it? (Please note that a scholarly database you access from the library page, or an online scan of a regular print journal, is not a website.)

**6. Post analysis of an article on your topic**

Analyze a critical article on your topic, something you find via the MLA bibliography or JSTOR. Model your critique it on our analysis of the articles we did in class. Is this useful? What are the warning signs, what are the signs that it is a good piece of research? What did you learn, and does it suggest directions for future research? Be sure to critique the ideas, not just the writing style.

**7. Post analysis/comparison of bios of your author**

Compare two pieces of biographical writing about the author you’re researching (at least one *must* be a print source, not from the internet). What are the signs that they’re trustworthy, or the warning signs that they’re not? What narratives are the biographers following? Who do they imagine as their audience? How do they use evidence? Where do they disagree, and how do you account for those differences?

**8. Post MLA list of articles for further research**

Post a list of articles relevant to your proposed research. *You just need the references, not the articles themselves.* Add a commentary where you write your topic and explain which are the best references, the ones you want to pursue. Criteria you might use: 1) is it on a relevant, useful aspect of the topic? 2) Did it appear in an accessible location, a journal you can get hold of? 3) Does it represent recent thinking on the topic? 4) Can you find anything about the author – is s/he a reputable expert?

**9. List qualities of articles you most admire**

Read a few of the articles you listed in #8, and discuss what two or three qualities you most admire in the writing. Could this be a model for your own work? In what ways? Try to zero in on specific moments in the writing that you find particularly effective, and figure out how the author achieves this effect.

**10. Write a draft**

Try to produce a complete draft, which means a rough copy of the full paper. Along the way, note what you’re having trouble with and make notes to yourself in boldface or underlined text, ie ‘can’t find word’ or ‘does this lead me away from my thesis?’ We will use these notes to brainstorm solutions in class.

Final Essay:

*Format:*

About 20 pages (which means more than 15 and less than 25)

MLA citation format with a Works Cited page

*Argument:*

You must aim to prove something

You must show why that something is worth saying

Is it new?

Is it something that hasn’t been fully understood before?

Is it something that will shed light on the text?

*Research:*

You must use books and journal articles and a biography (except in very special cases)

You must do enough research to explain basic assumptions in the field (‘critics assume...’ ‘scholars have always argued...’) so you can say how your work will differ

You must do enough research to find people to fight against

You must do enough research to find people to support you

You must always select your sources carefully and carefully analyze their credibility and usefulness and logic

*Outline:*

**Introduction paragraph:**

This is what everyone usually thinks, but here is what I’m actually going to prove and why it might be interesting or important to do so

**Background section, generally 1-3 pages:**

Give whatever historical, theoretical, or biographical information readers will need for you to make your argument (first tell them why they’ll need it)

**Your argument, generally 12 pages or so:**

Divide this into separate sections or paragraphs, each bloc incorporating quotations that can help drive the argument.

Please note that quotations need to drive the argument, not repeat it.

You will need to outline this in advance.

**Your conclusion paragraph:**

Show us why what you’ve demonstrated really matters.

Other issues

**Special Needs:** Located in Kiely Hall 171, the Office for Special Services for Students with Disabilities was established to make sure that students with disabilities have access to resources that will allow them to succeed at Queens College. If you have questions about services you might qualify for, visit their website at <http://sl.qc.cuny.edu/oss/index.php>. I’ll also be happy to talk with you about any questions or concerns you may have.

**Grades:** In a graduate class, grades mean something like this:

A+: superb, original, theoretically informed, complex, well researched; good enough for a Ph.D. program

A: really excellent, impressively researched, impeccable; this is ideal MA work

A-: fine work, very good, but usually has some flaw in it (disorganization, getting bogged down in notes, simplistic thesis, etc)

B+: keep working, you’re on the right track, but this is not at the level yet that we want for an MA program. It looks more like a college paper (it may be too reductive, underresearched, underthought, self-contradictory)

B: serious flaws and you really need to improve this immediately. (It may be way too short and simplistic, it may have little research or no theoretical perspective; something that might not get an A at the college level, even.)

anything below a B means it is not acceptable at MA level – B or below is a red flag: work on this right away.