

FINAL RESEARCH PAPER: ENGLISH 420W
LITERATURE IN ENGLAND

The basics: 10 pages (no fewer than 9, no more than 11), double-spaced, 12-point readable font, 1-inch margins. Include name, page numbers, and a title.

This is a research essay, which means you will be doing some research beyond the primary text(s). This will include other scholars' interpretations of this text and perhaps also historical contextual information. Making use of other people's arguments is a sophisticated process. You are not just using other critics' statements about a text to say what you want to say. Think instead about how your argument participates in an existing conversation. Your essay can also make use of information you learned from educators/tour guides while in London, Chawton, and/or Winchester if that is helpful to your argument.

Remember that the best papers are SPECIFIC in their focus. The most common comment I write on student papers is about the need for greater specificity, so narrow your focus as much as possible and keep asking yourself "how?" and "why?" Remember, also, that your argument needs to be DEBATABLE. Ask yourself whether you think anyone could reasonably voice a counterargument to your claim. If not, you might find you are summarizing or describing rather than arguing.

Some Things to Remember

- Your thesis statement announces your position exactly. It tells us what you want to say. It makes a **debatable** claim and a definite commitment for your essay. It also establishes expectations in your readers about what they expect to read in the body of your essay.
- **Get to the point!** You can use an introductory strategy if you wish, but try to avoid generalizations about literature, human experience, etc. at the beginning of your essay. Try to get to the point as soon as possible.
- **Narrow** your focus: The best papers are those that have a lot to say about a very specific aspect of a text. Keep asking yourself to be more specific.
- In your writing, try to be **concise**. Avoid repetition of ideas across sentences. Try to use active verbs.
- **Proofread** your essay! This will help you cut out redundant phrases and typos. It can be helpful to step back from your paper after you have written it and then return to it with fresh eyes.
- **Introduce** quotations and paraphrases from your primary and critical texts carefully so that they flow from your argument. **Analyze** your quotations; don't try to let them do the work for you.
- **Cite your sources** clearly using MLA format (parenthetical citations and works cited).

PAPER PROPOSAL: Due June 14 (electronically via email to gibsona@duq.edu with the subject line "420 Paper Proposal")

This one-page proposal is your chance to describe your thesis and the evidence you plan to use to support it. In this proposal you should plan to tell me: 1) your topic and texts; 2) your working thesis: at this stage in the process, what do you plan to argue? 3) an initial idea of the evidence you plan to use to support that argument; and 4) identify at least three scholarly sources you plan to use in your research.

A note about finding sources: These should be sources that you believe are most relevant to the argument *you* want to make, and should include peer-reviewed literary criticism as well as whatever else is necessary to your research (e.g. cultural/intellectual history, additional primary sources, etc., as long as these are scholarly sources). Some of the best places to begin looking for sources include library Research Databases, including the MLA International Bibliography and the library catalog. Google Books can be helpful for locating books you want to then find in the library. Use keywords related to your topic. Depending upon how narrow or broad your topic is, consider widening your search beyond criticism focused on the individual text you are working with. Remember that if you are not on campus you will need to find sources you can access at a local library or online (Gumberg library has access to certain ebooks and a range of databases, including JStor and Project Muse).

OPTIONAL FIRST PARAGRAPH AND OUTLINE: Due July 3 (electronically via email to gibsona@duq.edu with the subject line “420 Outline”)

If you would like feedback on a first paragraph and outline, please submit these to me no later than this date. I won't be able to read later submissions. I will respond with comments no later than July 7.

PAPER DUE: July 12 (electronically via email to gibsona@duq.edu with the subject line “420 Paper”)

Final paper due electronically as a WORD or PDF document via email.

PAPER PROMPTS

The following prompts are designed to inspire you, not to constrain you. Use these to come up with your own THESIS and structure an ARGUMENT about a topic. Remember to support your points through TEXTUAL EVIDENCE. Remember to make points not only about WHAT the text says, but HOW it says it (i.e. focus on form as well as content). You can choose to write about more than one text (and author), but I encourage you to limit yourself to no more than two texts, especially if you are discussing longer texts or ambitious topics. This paper should be focused on readings from our syllabus, although if you are particularly interested in writing about other nineteenth-century British texts you have read, please consult with me early in the process.

1. Sociologist Georg Simmel wrote that “modern life has developed, in the midst of metropolitan crowdedness, a technique for making and keeping private matters secret, such as earlier could be attained only by means of social isolation” (336-37).¹ He describes a paradox: the city is both crowded and full of secrets. Write an essay in which you consider this urban paradox in relation to one or two of the texts we have read that has something to do with the metropolis (London). How do private and public, social life and isolation, intersect in these London-related texts?
2. Write a paper in which you make an argument about a specific way in which Charles Dickens addresses one of the following topics: poverty, crime, childhood, moral duty, race, population, urbanization, the workhouse, or another topic of your choice related to social life. Consider writing about *Oliver Twist*, “A Christmas Carol,” and/or one of the essays you read from *Night Walks* (“Night Walks,” “Gone Astray,” “On an Amateur Beat” “Wapping Workhouse,” “A Small Star in the East”).

¹ Simmel, Georg. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. Translated and edited by Kurt. H. Wolff, The Free Press, 1950.

3. Choose a place (a building, a park, etc.) or an object in a museum (or a collection of them—artworks, etc.) that you see when you are in England. Pair it with a text you have read from our syllabus. Write an essay in which you read and analyze both of these “texts” together to make an argument. Your argument might be about how the object informs the text (e.g. how Waterhouse’s painting of “The Lady of Shalott” interprets and relates to Tennyson’s poem and/or Malory’s narrative). It might be about how the place/object sheds light on the text (e.g. how we might re-read *Oliver Twist* in light of Dickens’s manuscripts/his house; how you think Chawton informed *Pride and Prejudice*, which Austen heavily revised while living there; how the design of a Victorian surgical theatre sheds light on Conan Doyle’s “His First Operation”). You might find an object in a museum while you are in England that sheds new light on your understanding of one of the texts you have read. Use this as a basis for the research that leads you to an exciting essay topic!
4. Choose either a series of photographs by John Thomson or a selection of illustrations by Gustave Doré. Pair them with a text of your choice from our syllabus and write an essay in which you make and support an argument about the intersections between the visual images and the text. You might consider things like: How do they work in different media to convey similar/very different “pictures” of London life? How do the formal features of your chosen text parallel those of your chosen images? How does your chosen text create “visual images” that function in similar ways to the photographs or illustrations? Etc. Again, remember that you are not just summarizing similarities/differences; you need to be using those similarities/differences to make an argument.
5. Alfred, Lord Tennyson based his famous poem “The Lady of Shalott” on older, existing Arthurian legends. In fact, many Victorian poets (and painters) were interested in Arthurian legend and Medievalism, including Tennyson, William Morris, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Using two Victorian sources you encountered in this course, and doing some research into Victorian medievalism or Arthurian legend, write an essay in which you make an argument about how these two texts (poems, paintings, stories) make use of Arthurian (or other medieval) stories and tropes. You might consider how they combine medieval romance with Victorian topics/issues (e.g. gender roles, progress, Realism, industrialism, etc.).
6. Consider the significance of *place* in Dickens’s *Oliver Twist*. Write an essay in which you make an argument about how place functions. You might consider things like the relationship between setting and character; the significance of London versus the countryside; Dickens’s depiction of urban crime, etc. (Note that you are also welcome to come up with your own essay topic in relation to this novel, either using it as your central focus, combining it with other texts you have read, or making use of your learning about Dickens while in London. Just try to make sure your focus your analysis on as specific a topic as possible.)
7. Consider an aspect of setting or place in *Pride and Prejudice* and use it to craft an argument about the novel. You might think about: Pemberley; Netherfield Park; Rosings; the small community of Meryton; Regency England; social “place” (i.e. class). If you pick a “big” topic, try to pinpoint a very specific focus. (Note that you are also welcome to come up with your own essay topic in relation to this novel, either using it as your central focus, combining it with other texts you have read, or making use of your learning about Austen while in Chawton. Just try to make sure your focus your analysis on as specific a topic as possible.)

8. Jane Austen and Charles Dickens are considered to be two of the most significant novelists of the nineteenth century, but their novels are very different, and the two novels you read take as their focus very different arenas of life. However, both Austen and Dickens are known for their irony, wit, and dry humor. Write an essay in which you make a comparative argument about how these two authors use irony (or another element of tone), making sure to substantiate your comparison by considering just why we might pay attention to this relationship. Since irony is often used in the service of a critique/to highlight the differences between how things are and how they appear, you might want to consider the focus and purpose of each author's irony.
9. Write an essay in which you make a specific argument about the relationship between detection and the urban world in one or both of the Sherlock Holmes stories you read.
10. Write an essay in which you make an argument about how one or two of the texts you have read deals with poverty and/or wealth in nineteenth-century London (e.g. Dickens, Mayhew, Banks, Reynolds).
11. In Blake's "London" (written before the turn of the century), we find a wanderer who observes his surroundings ("I wander through each charter'd street/Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,/And mark in every face I meet/Marks of weakness, marks of woe"). We see a lot of wandering and observing in our texts. Think of Dickens's *Uncommercial Traveler* essays (the ones collected in *Night Walks* on your reading list). You might even think of Dickens's wandering and observing narrator in *Oliver Twist*. Write an essay in which you consider the function of wandering and observing in texts we have read. You might consider the concept of the *flâneur* if you pick this topic.
12. A topic of your own! You are more than welcome to come up with your own essay topic, as long as it:
 - a. Meets the other requirements listed here;
 - b. Deals with at least one text on our reading list;
 - c. Finds a narrow point of focus so that you avoid generalizations and instead craft and support a strong and specific argument.

A Reminder: PLEASE DO NOT PLAGIARIZE. Your work should be your own; I am interested in *your* ideas and interpretations. Any ideas you draw from elsewhere should be clearly cited and engaged with in your paper. The penalty for plagiarism is failure of the assignment (a "0" grade) and, in egregious cases, failure of the course.

Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or concerns.

Dr. Gibson's Grading Rubric for Literature Research Papers

To grade your paper I will use the following questions, scored according to the following rubric:

- 5 = excellent
- 4 = very good
- 3 = good
- 2 = needs work
- 1 = poor

Argument and Critical Reading

Does the paper clearly state a specific thesis? That is, does it offer a focused and debatable argument?	
Is this argument sustained throughout the paper?	
Is the thesis supported with carefully selected textual evidence?	
Does the paper demonstrate close, critical readings of a/the primary text(s)? (In other words, does the paper interpret and analyze rather than summarize the text(s)?)	

Research and Critical Conversation

Does the paper clearly articulate a position in relation to an existing critical conversation about the text(s)/topic in question, respectfully acknowledging other critics' claims?	
Does the paper make use of other critics' claims in order to advance its argument, making clear how this paper's claims are adding to the existing conversation?	
Are all sources properly cited both parenthetically in text and in a works cited list according to the MLA guidelines?	

Writing and Organization

Is the paper well organized? Does each paragraph present and sustain a key claim/idea that supports the paper's overall argument?	
Is the paper clearly written? Is the writing free of grammatical errors and typos? Do the paragraphs transition smoothly from one idea to the next?	
Does the paper demonstrate the writer's thoughtful, personal, and creative interpretation of the text(s)?	

Student: _____

Total points out of 50: _____