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21L.016 / 21M.616 Learning from the Past: Drama, Science, Performance
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Guidelines for Analytic Research Paper

One of the goals of this course is to ensure that you are able to write an **analytic, thesis-driven paper** that makes an evidence-based argument. Its argument will derive from your thoughtful meditation upon a primary text or texts from the period, studied in some depth and understood within a broader context illuminated by the class readings and your own scholarly research. The thesis statement will help reveal your interpretation of the text or event, and the essay in its entirety will illuminate its significance.

Please make sure the topic holds enough interest for you to enjoy the hours involved in researching, refining, and communicating your thoughts.

Generate a hypothesis. As you read, consider whether the materials support, complicate, or refute your hypothesis. If they do not support it, you'll want to modify your thesis or else counter the arguments or interpretations within those materials. One of the strongest ways to make an argument is *not* to deny all other interpretations, but rather to acknowledge counter-arguments and show why they are either subordinate or only obliquely raise problems for your own interpretation. Be sure to step back, reflect on what you are learning, and think about what you really believe is the best argument: that's the one to make.

Organize your points in order to make the argument most effectively. Sometimes, that means beginning with your strongest case, then acknowledging other interpretations but as you do so revealing why those aren't as compelling as your own. In other instances, it may mean prioritizing a sequence of points, perhaps starting specifically and then expanding the layers of context that are relevant to your argument, or building from your most widely accepted point to the most arguable, speculative, or challenging. The most important thing is to match your paper's organization to the steps in the analytic argument you are trying to make.

Once you have a sense of structure and outline, spend time crafting your thoughts in clear, stylish sentences that will engage your audience. Make sure you have a thesis that can be adequately developed and supported with textual evidence within the ten-page format. Ideally, your conclusions will be compelling, persuasive, and not immediately obvious. We appreciate imagination, sensitivity, and wit, in a title as elsewhere; they can coexist peacefully (indeed, they thrive) with argumentation and correct, concise prose. Please allow plenty of time to proofread.

Remember, this is not a book report or a "survey of the literature" of the sort you might do for a science project: it is a paper driven by your own interpretation of the material, carefully considered. We care less about the quantity of sources than about the *quality* both of those sources and of your engagement with them.

10 pages (standard type and margins), due Monday, April 27 by 5 p.m. at the latest.