**Essay Requirements**

Approx 2,000 words

12 pt. font / Times New Roman / Double-spaced

MLA format – use:

<https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html>

Follow the proper in-text citation format and the proper Works Cited format

**NOTE: THERE IS A STRICT PLAGIARISM POLICY. Any papers found to contain unreferenced material will receive a failing grade and undermine your participation in this course.**

**Writing an essay - notes**

**In an essay you need to:**

* Locate the key terms of the question
* Determine what the correlation among these terms is.
* Deal with each aspect of the question
* Organize your answer into an essay
* Have a thesis and a full body development
* Use examples from the texts
* Discuss and analyze don’t just state and mention, or ‘copypaste’ your notes, without appropriate critical assimilation and integration; avoid juxtaposing fragments from your class notes especially when you do not substantiate points / claims with critical analysis and close reading
* Attempt to organise your essay progressively through discussion of themes / ideas, and try to avoid describing the text in a linear manner

Supporting a main idea with research:

* Collect sources that support your main idea (academic writings, interviews etc)
* Read and think critically about your material
* Ask yourself how relevant, valid, and accurate your sources are
* Isolate and note specific references / citations that will corroborate your writings

Organising ideas:

* Organise your information into smaller categories, each of which should be unified by a topic sentence that relates to your topic and expresses a related idea.
* Support each topic sentence with specific details and examples culled from your research
* Do your own close reading of the texts that you will engage with and take notes, critically addressing the issues and themes that you want to explore
* **Prepare an outline of your essay:**

This may take the form of a series of points *[and a couple of lines about each point]* which would essentially constitute your argument and analysis. While outlining your work and ideas think about developing **your own** reading and perspective on the chosen text(s); think about how your points would take your argument forward

**Writing an essay:**

Writing your paper is about developing your ideas and argument in an appropriate critical register. While working on your first draft, you need to have a clear sense of your development, and analysis, stay focused and avoid being descriptive as much as possible. Your secondary/ bibliographical sources should be incorporated into your text, either in support of your argument, as evidence of where you have drawn ideas and/or context from, or as an ‘other’ reading of / or critical perspective on the work you are writing about. A research-based academic paper should be balanced between argument and focused, critical close reading of the texts.

Distinguish between general remarks / observations, overviews and specific analysis

An essay needs to have a clear sense of structure and development; it should include:

* An introduction in which you identify a focused topic and present your point of view, the thesis of the paper
* A short literature review of other points of view on your topic—that is, background on the topic. This summary could be a narrative paragraph that shows how the research is pertinent to your thesis
* Evidence to support your thesis
* Acknowledgement of opposing points of view and their differences from your point of view
* A conclusion that restates your thesis and reconfigures your critical issues

Things to avoid in your essay:

Do not offer an overview on a period or a movement in general, in a way that is unrelated to your discussion and critical analysis.

Do not focus οn the biography of the writer(s).

Do not refer to texts, or the general characteristics of a writer’s work that are not the main primary material and focus of your essay.

DO NOT write in a journalistic and/or impressionistic manner. Don’t get carried away by the issues contained in texts in an impressionistic, didactic, moralising or generalising manner

Your critical argument aims to examine how an issue is handled, approached, represented, evoked IN the texts, not to discuss in general the issue itself (i.e. slavery, religion, or women’s rights).

DO NOT write /state the obvious. You avoid this by staying focused and have a clear sense of the structure of your essay and of the organisation of your ideas. (i.e. Don’t discuss the “modernism” of a particular text, (it’s awkward at the level of both expression and analysis) discuss, *for instance*, the particular use of metaphor *or* image (etc) that is characteristic of modernist writing.

**Essay Topics - Weeks 1-7**

1. Discuss Washington Irving’s “Rip van Winkle” as an anti-Franklian hero; what does the story suggest about the American Dream? What are the strengths and weaknesses of committing to the American work ethic?
2. Discuss Washington Irving’s “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” as an example of Dark Romanticism.
3. Read Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “The Minister’s Black Veil” in light of the Romantic authors’ use of symbolism as a way of reaching beyond the literal meaning of everyday objects.
4. It could be said that Hawthorne saw and critiqued the moral cruelty of the Puritan mind. Trace elements of Puritanism in “the Minister’s Black Veil” and discuss the extent to which Hawthorne embraces or critiques Puritan ideology in the story.
5. Nathaniel Hawthorne claimed that the readers’ imagination could be manipulated through mood and imagery. Discuss the ways in which this is achieved in Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher”.
6. R. W. Emerson, whose philosophy influenced Thoreau, wrote that “words are also actions, and actions are a kind of words.” Explain specific ways in which Thoreau’s writing may be considered a ‘practice’ of Emerson’s theory; how does Emerson’s quotation apply to Thoreau’s “Resistance to Civil Government?” Pay particular attention to the relationship between self-expression and personal conscience.
7. In *Nature* (1836), Ralph Emerson wrote: “To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me. But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars. The rays that come from those heavenly worlds, will separate between him and what he touches."

“So shall we come to look at the world with new eyes. It shall answer the endless inquiry of the intellect, — What is truth? and of the affections, — What is good? by yielding itself passive to the educated Will. ... Build, therefore, your own world. As fast as you conform your life to the pure idea in your mind, that will unfold its great proportions. A correspondent revolution in things will attend the influx of the spirit.” How does H.D. Thoreau’s *Walden* offer a practical application of Emerson’s ideas?

1. Choose one of the possible interpretations/ readings of Herman Melville’s “Bartleby the Scrivener” and argue for it using the formal elements of the text.
2. In certain novels and short stories of American writers in the nineteenth century there is an attempt to portray personal betrayal and psychological violence. Poe and Melville clearly attempt such portrayals but in different styles and narratives. Compare and contrast the artistic approaches of these two master story-tellers to the experience of violence.
3. Discuss the imagery/symbol of the garden in Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” and Henry James’s “The Aspern Papers” and the ways in which they contribute to characterization; how do these images reflect the characters of the stories?
4. Discuss the notion of the *doppelgänger*  in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” and Edgar Allan Poe’s “William Wilson”
5. Discuss the ways in which setting (both temporal and spatial) helps express the themes of the story in Kate Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour”
6. Discuss the ways in which Kate Chopin’s “The Story of an Hour” and “The Storm” perform a disruption of the “domestic sphere” in which women were held in the 19th century and constitute radical feminist writings of women’s longing for independence and self-realisation.
7. Discuss changes in the concept of the American self in the early nineteenth century. Locate your discussion within specific works by at least two writers, such as Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne and Melville.
8. Consider and compare literary portraits of women engaged in a struggle against social conventions and towards personal freedom and independence in 19th century American fiction.

**Essay Topics - Weeks 8-13**

1. Read F. S. Fitzgerald’s “The Rich Boy” in light of the writer’s essay “Echoes of the Jazz Age” and discuss the ways Fitzgerald’s story exemplifies the characteristics of the Roaring 20s.
2. Consider the ways in which the concept of time becomes a major thematic preoccupation, but also a constitutive element of narration, one that invites extensive experimentation, in Ernest Hemingway’s “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” and William Faulkner’s “A Rose for Emily.”
3. Discuss William Faulkner’s “Barn Burning” as an example of Modernist Fiction.
4. Discuss the characteristics of the Southern Gothic heroine, particularly in relation to the society and culture in which she develops; use examples from William Faulkner’s “A Rose for Emily” and Eudora Welty’s “Lily Daw and the Three Ladies”.
5. Trace the development of American gothic in its different appropriations and manifestations (feminist, Southern) drawing examples from any works of your choosing.
6. Discuss the themes of friendship and family in Toni Morrison’s “Recitatif”
7. Discuss the importance of objects in Alice Walker’s “Everyday Use” with reference to characterization but also the construction of personal, familial or cultural identity.
8. Discuss the themes of egalitarianism and totalitarianism in Kurt Vonnegut Jr.’s “Welcome to the Monkey House” considering issues of both genre and narrative technique.
9. Elaborate on two characteristics of postmodernist fiction by drawing examples from texts of your own choosing.
10. Consider the postmodernist perception of language as self-contained and self-referential, no longer mirroring an outside objective reality, to discuss Thomas Pynchon’s tone and language in “Entropy.”
11. Compare and contrast narrative techniques of experimentation and fragmentation in modernist and post-modernist works of fiction, drawing examples from the works included in your course syllabus.
12. Read Deborah Eisenberg’s “Twilight of the Superheroes” as an example of post-9/11 trauma fiction.

**NOTE:** Please contact the instructor if you need access to any of the texts mentioned above.