

Politics and Literature Writing Assignments

Overview: There are four ways to complete the writing requirement for this course. You must commit to one of these options by the beginning of the third week of class. Once you have made that commitment, you may not change your mind, no matter how mercurial and tetchy your second-semester-senior mind becomes; I intend for you to be thinking about a single writing project with some focus throughout the entire semester (and will be grading on the basis of that intention). Be assured, too, that we will devote at least some amount of class time to the discussion of everyone's projects.

As you work to complete these assignments, you will find some documents that may be of help to you – a list of important theoretical works on politics and literature, a list of sample paper topics, and the like – on the “resources” section of the Sakai webpage for this course.

Option 1: An Intensive Literary Analysis

Write a paper that explores a work of literature *not* on this syllabus in terms of the themes of this course. This paper must be at least 20 pages long.

If you select this option, I recommend that you check your literary selection with me before spring break and consult with me on occasion about your progress. Your paper must be turned in on or before the last Friday of the semester.

Option 2: A Long-Form Theoretical Argument

Write a paper that explains and defends your own understanding of the relationship between politics and literature. This paper must be at least 20 pages long and take into account existing theories of that relationship.

If you select this option, I recommend that you develop at least a rudimentary thesis by spring break and run that thesis by me. Your paper should be turned in on or before the last Friday of the semester.

Option 3: Shorter Literary Analyses

Write three papers over the course of the semester, each of which analyzes a book on this syllabus in terms of the themes of this course. (I leave the specific foci of your papers up to you, though I am happy to discuss your animating questions, thesis statements, and arguments with you at any point.) Each of those papers should be five to seven pages long.

If you select this option, your papers are due on the days that we discuss the books about which you are writing. (For instance, if you were to choose to write a paper about *The House of Sand and Fog*, that paper would be due at the beginning of class on the day we discuss that book.)

If you select this option, you may also choose to write a fourth paper. At the end of the semester, I will count only your three best papers in calculating your grade.

Option 4: An Exploration of Theories and a Short-Form Theoretical Argument

We do not read any “secondary” theories of politics and literature in this class, although we could. Many great thinkers have explored the relationship between politics and literature.

Write four short papers, each two to three pages long, each of which explicates a serious thinker’s understanding of the relationship between politics and literature. Then, near the end of the semester, write a longer paper – approximately 10 pages long – which, taking into account those theories of politics and literature about which you have already written (and perhaps others), explains and defends your own understanding of the relationship between politics and literature.

If you would like to write a fifth short paper at any point during the semester, I would be happy to grade the extra work; at the end of the semester, I will only count your four best paper grades when I calculate your final grade for the written component of the course.)

If you select this option, I recommend that you check in with me about your progress and plans throughout the semester. Your first two papers must be turned in by the fifth week of class, your second two papers by the eighth week of class, and your final, ten-page paper by the last Friday of the semester.

Option 5: Creative Work and Reflection

Produce your own work of literature: a short story, a poem or set of poems, a graphic novel – or, heck, an entire novel. This work should, in your mind, echo or invoke or reflect or resonate with the themes of this course. Your creative work should be at least 20 pages long and should be intellectually and artistically substantial. In addition, write a reflection, at least ten pages long, about how your own work of creation was informed by this course and how your act of creation, in turn, informs your understanding of the relationship between politics and literature.

If you select this option, I recommend that you consult with me at some length about your ideas, plans, and progress throughout the semester. Your work and reflection should be turned in on or before the last Friday of the semester.