**MODEL PROMPT: ENGLISH RESEARCH PAPER**

**Purpose:**

This assignment is designed to hone your research skills. You will become an expert on the text about which you write. You’ll also practice your skills at close reading and at either cultural or formal criticism. Because you’ll largely be responsible for designing the parameters of this paper yourself, this assignment will also give you a chance to practice thinking about ways to organize complex arguments.

**Summary:**

In this research paper, you will choose your own topic. You’ll write a persuasive argument about a text, preferably drawn from our course reading (although I am flexible on this; if you can make a case for why another text can speak to the ideas we’ve explored this semester, then come see me). Drawing from close reading and secondary sources, you’ll build a case for your thesis.

**Logistics:**

* Your paper is due on the day of our exam.
* Your paper should be 15 to 18 pages long.
* You should hand in your rough draft and peer review with your paper.
* Your paper should be typed in 12 pt. Times New Roman Font.
* Your paper should use MLA style and include a bibliography.

**Important sections:**

Although the organization of this paper is up to you, your paper should incorporate at least six secondary sources.

Early in your paper, you should include a few paragraphs of context - not necessarily a formal literature review, but you’ll need to show readers that you’re familiar with the important criticism about your topic.

You should include in your paper an answer to the question – “So what?”

Your paper should address one or more of the ideas we’ve discussed in class this semester.

**Framing questions:**

Here are some questions to consider as you write your papers:

What text do you want to use?

What do important critics have to say about your text?

What critical approach do you want to use?

What should your readers (your classmates) know about this approach? Are there any theories you need to explain? Any terms?

How will you back up your argument?

How does your argument tie into one of the ideas of our class?

Why is your argument important? In other words, what does your argument teach us about one or more of the following: the text, the critical approach, or the idea from our course?

**Evaluation Criteria:**

Your grade for this paper will be based on the following:

Originality and sophistication of your thesis

Use of primary source(s) to back your thesis

Use of secondary source(s) to back your thesis

Organization of your paper

Evidence of revision after peer review

Use of signposts and transitions

Use of style and genre guides in the body of your paper & the bibliography

Use of grammar, mechanics, and vocabulary appropriate to audience

**Resources:**

The DEWC website has links to MLA style guides.

The DEWC also has consultants who will work with you on your paper.

I am available during office hours or by appointment to talk with you about your paper.

**Tips for approaching this paper:**

Start early. We’ll be working on this paper together in class quite a bit, so you’ll have some deadlines to keep you on track. It’s important that you invest attention and time in your early drafts; these are where your ideas will start to take shape, and the stronger your first draft is, the stronger your final paper will be.

Go for the challenge. If you pick a thesis because it will be easy to prove, chances are it would be equally easy for your readers to prove, and that leaves them few compelling reasons to get interested in your paper.

Talk it out. It’s incredibly helpful to articulate your ideas to another person – something about the switch from writing to talking can help you clarify a point or better see where you’re still fuzzy. You can visit the DEWC to brainstorm with a consultant there, if you like, or you’re welcome to come talk to me.

Revise as you write. Don’t neglect a good idea because it means restructuring what’s come before. Often we figure out what we want to say in a paper as we’re writing it. There is ample time for revision built into the timeline for this project; don’t be afraid to move in a new direction if that’s where your research or thinking leads.

**Common errors:**

Watch out for a thesis that is too general. We’ll be workshopping theses in class, but the draft you bring in should be as specific as possible.

Make sure your thesis is debatable. If readers would immediately agree with you, why should they keep reading past your introduction?