Writing and Research in Literature

In literature, mythology, and many other humanities classes, meaningful assignments incorporate research focus on specific styles and genres found in professional models. This Humanities Writing Guide suggests seven types of writing commonly used in the humanities, followed by sample assignments and rubrics for five of them. Here are the seven suggestions:

1. **Reader Response**: express first impression and personal associations to a text; record first response and use that material as the basis of an essay
2. **Summary**: briefly restate or condense the plot of a text
3. **Essay on Literary Text**: explicate source texts and analyze their form and component parts
4. **Literary Review**: evaluate texts on the basis of analysis
5. **Evaluating Critical Articles**: research specific topics in the disciplines of literature and the humanities
6. **Synthesis of source texts and research**: publication-quality text interpretation and analysis that includes current and historical critical perspectives, this is a college-level research paper.
7. **Practice high-level communication skills**: encounter texts in writing as well as in live or recorded performance. Discuss interpretations with others. Revise essays in light of evolving understanding. These skills underpin and enrich the study of literature in face-to-face classrooms.

**1. Reader Response Paper: Sample Assignment and Rubric**

Students will keep a Reader Reaction Journal, which means that they write while they read, a valuable skill towards mastery of critical reading. As students read novels and short fiction and listen to poetry, they will practice selecting quotes that they find interesting, and making notes about the style and content of the novel. From this reading journal, students will compose a three-page Reader Reaction paper.

Work will be evaluated on the following; from these elements, instructors can create a grading rubric:

- The paper examines the time, place, and cultural background of the work. The paper clearly shows how socio-historical conditions influence particular forms, genres, and ideas in literary works.
- The paper identifies issues that emerge from the author’s personal experience. The journal writer discusses these biographical circumstances as another source of influence in literary works.
- The writer engages with the values expressed in the work, on a personal level.
• The writer supports the original ideas in the paper by using specific incidents and quotes that demonstrate the author’s style, content, and themes of the work.
• The writer demonstrates critical thinking, careful reading, and coherent, college-level writing.

2. Summary of a Text: Sample Assignment and Rubric

Summaries are needed as the starting point of all other literary work. Students will summarize a text.

Work will be evaluated as follows; from these elements, instructors can create a grading rubric:

• The summary is brief, fewer than 250 words, and may be given as a single paragraph. Author and title are included.
• The summary achieves its brevity by omitting almost all concrete details and minor characters and episodes of the original.
• The summary is as accurate as possible.
• The summary is written in the present tense.

3. Essay on Literary Text: Sample Assignment and Rubric

Students will write a three- to five-page, double-spaced essay on a text of their choice.

Work will be evaluated as follows; from these elements, instructors can create a grading rubric:

• The writer develops a thesis that clearly identifies an important theme or meaning of the work(s) under discussion.
• The writer discusses the theme(s) throughout each of the works chosen.
• The writer analyzes the content, theme, and style of the works, and uses specific incidents and quotes to illustrate the chosen theme.
• The writer identifies the cultural and historical contexts of the works under discussion.
• The writer demonstrates critical thinking, careful reading, and coherent, college-level writing.

4. Literary Review: Sample Assignment and Rubric

Compose a two-paged, double-spaced book review on one of the works studied.
Work will be evaluated on the following; from these elements, instructors can create a grading rubric:

- A summary of the work under discussion
- An analysis of the literary features of the work
- An evaluation of the work

5. Evaluating Critical Article: Sample Assignment and Rubric

Through research in scholarly journals, students will locate, study, and analyze a critical article on one of the authors studied in this unit. A three-page, double-spaced summary of the article will include an evaluation of the ideas presented.

Work will be evaluated on the following; from these elements, instructors can create a grading rubric:

- Effective research and demonstration of understanding of various literary critical methods and theories
- Clear presentation of ideas addressed in the critical article
- Evaluation of strengths and weaknesses of the critical article

6. Synthesis of source texts and research

Students will write a research paper that demonstrates literary interpretation and analysis as well as current and historical critical perspectives. The work will be evaluated according to the state-mandated learning outcomes for the course.

Here are the course description and learning outcomes (competencies) for LIT 115, Introduction to Literature; from these elements, instructors can create a grading rubric:

Description: Introduces students to fiction, poetry, and drama. Emphasizes active and responsive reading. This course is one of the Statewide Guaranteed Transer courses. GT-AH2

STANDARD COMPETENCIES:

I. Define the functions of literature.
   A. Illustrate ways in which literature interprets the human condition.
   B. Illustrate ways in which literature gives pleasure to its readers.
   C. Illustrate ways in which literature attempts to instruct and correct human behavior.
II. Identify and explore universal themes, topics and patterns in works studied.
III. Analyze structural elements in literary works.
   A. Identify and demonstrate the use of basic structural elements of prose fiction.
   B. Identify and demonstrate the use of basic structural elements of poetry.
   C. Identify and demonstrate the use of basic structural elements of drama.
IV. Analyze cultural and historical contexts of literature and their contemporary relevance.
   A. Identify and demonstrate the presence of basic cultural and historical contexts.
   B. Analyze the function, significance, and contemporary relevance of basic cultural and historical contexts.
V. Demonstrate the ability to select and apply contemporary forms of technology to solve problems or compile information.

TOPICAL OUTLINE:
I. Define the Function of Literature
   A. Interpreting the human condition
   B. Giving pleasure
   C. Instructing and correcting human behavior
II. Illustrate Applicable and Relevant Universal Literary Themes and Patterns
III. Analyze Structural Elements of Prose Fiction
   A. Plot
   B. Theme
   C. Imagery
   D. Figurative Language
   E. Character
   F. Point of View and Irony
   G. Tone and Voice
   H. Setting
   I. Symbolism
IV. Analyze Structural Elements of Poetry
   A. Meter/Rhyme
   B. Figurative Language
   C. Stanzaic Forms
   D. Allusion
   E. Imagery
   F. Speaker and Irony
   G. Setting and Situation
   H. Symbolism
V. Analyze Structural Elements of Drama
   A. Character
   B. Plot
   C. Stagecraft
   D. Theme
   E. Imagery
   F. Setting
   G. Language
H. Symbolism
VI. Analyze the Cultural and Historical Contexts of Literature and their Contemporary Relevance as Appropriate

7. **Practice high-level communication skills**: Students encounter texts in writing as well as in live or recorded performance. Listening and talking are valuable skills in developing literary interpretations. Offer students opportunities to discuss interpretations with others. Allow time for students to revise essays in light of evolving understanding. These skills underpin and enrich the study of literature in face-to-face and distance courses.