

POSITION PAPER

Due March 25 at 10 a.m. on Sakai. (extended)

Write a short, argumentative essay on a theoretical question about data in the study of literature raised by one or more of the readings. Exemplify your claims; do not remain at the level of generalization, but present an analysis of evidence, which may be tentative, partial, or prospective in nature. The typical paper will interpret data-making processes (aggregation, abstraction, quantification, system-construction) and the rhetoric of data in relation to a theoretical theme like reading, literariness, form, writing, or authorship. You are not expected to analyze any data yourself, though if you wish to sketch a very small-scale example, you may.

I am eager to talk to all of you about your ideas.

The paper need not develop an extensive further bibliography. As in a conference paper, the emphasis falls on:

1. presenting a strong argument;
2. establishing the stakes of making that argument within a scholarly conversation (what Pierre Bourdieu calls “position-taking”);
3. exemplifying your reasoning through the analysis of a—necessarily restricted—domain of evidence.

This paper can be thought of as either a conference paper or as the abbreviated version of what might become a longer essay.

LATE POLICY

I really dislike imposing late penalties on graduate students, but I don't want you to linger over this paper. I will consider requests for very short extensions, but papers that come in after March 29 can receive no higher than a 3.0 (B).

ON FORMATTING

Obviously formatting is not important. Nonetheless, why not produce a good-looking printed page?

Basic level: a good typeface. Times and the Microsoft “C” family (Cambria, etc.) are not good—they were designed for other uses than setting extended print texts. Garamond is a classic face that is so designed. The Mac ships with a beautiful text face, Hoefler Text. Many people like Baskerville, though its “rationalist” style is not to my taste.

Fussy level: the right file format. PDF, not Word format, is the only guarantee that someone on a different computer will see what you see on your screen.

Perfectionist level: typographic niceties. Use em and en dashes, not double-hyphens and single hyphens; use typographer’s quotes, not straight quotes; use ligatures (fl, fi, ff, ffi, ffl); use a single word space after periods, not two spaces. Word’s AutoCorrect does all these for you, some of the time. Use text or “old-style” figures (1234); unfortunately, many free fonts lack these, but there are increasingly good options out there (look for OpenType fonts). Don’t double-space or use tiny one-inch margins; these are ludicrous relics from the typewriter era. Use ampler margins and leading like that used in nicely produced journals (probably you want only slightly more than “single” spacing).

Maniac level: markdown is not only for code. You *could* write your entire paper in R Markdown that just happens not to have any R in it, and use “Knit PDF” in RStudio to typeset it. You can resize the Source pane to be more capacious. A paper-writing template is available in the latest `agoldst/litdata` that lets you tweak some typographic options.