

Final Odyssey Assignment
Major Grade
Due:

For this assignment, you will write a very detailed outline of an evaluative argument over the *Odyssey*.

An evaluative argument takes a position on whether or not a character or the text itself is a good (bad/the best/the worst) example of something. Although it may seem as if our own evaluations of things are personal matters of taste, we often have our own criteria in mind when deciding why the first Harry Potter movie is a good adaptation of the book, or why the worst way to write a paper is by pulling an all-nighter. If we were to turn one of these evaluations into a formula, it might look something like this:

The worst way to write a paper is by pulling an all-nighter because

- A. you cannot get feedback from the teacher
- B. you are more likely to choose an easy argument rather than a challenging one
- C. you are too rushed and tired to do a good job editing and polishing your writing.

As a formula, an evaluative argument looks like this:

X is a good (bad/the best/the worst) Y because it fulfills (or doesn't fulfill) criteria A, B, and C.

When applying the evaluative argument to literature, you can evaluate an element of the text, such as a character or the use of figurative language, such as a particular symbol or form of irony. You can also evaluate the text as a whole. Here are a couple of examples:

In John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, George is the best kind of friend a person could have because he is loyal through both thick and thin, he is honest, and he is willing to sacrifice his own needs for those of his friend.

John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* is a great argument for the choice of euthanasia. This is because the novella shows that in some cases, euthanasia is indeed the only humane option, and that euthanasia can offer dignity to the sufferer. Most importantly, though, the novella realistically depicts the choice to euthanize as difficult, painful, and most definitely not an easy solution.

In preparation for your first literary analysis, which will happen in the winter term, you will create a detailed outline of an evaluative argument about *The Odyssey* that contains each element that is central to well-rounded, well-organized, and well-argued claim about a text.

Your writing assignment will include:

- A full introduction, including a thesis statement with detailed criteria
- Topic sentence for each body paragraph (one for each criteria and one for the larger significance of your argument)
- Two pieces of evidence for each body paragraph (6 quotes total--8 maximum)
- Close reading for each piece of evidence
- Three ideas for an effective conclusion

Since your argument is evaluative, your thesis should fit that rhetorical framework:

X is a good (bad/the best/the worst) Y because it fulfills (or doesn't fulfill) criteria A, B, and C.

Possible starting points for your topics:

- Odysseus is a good/bad/effective/ineffectual hero, father, or husband because...
- Telemachus is a _____ son, leader, hero because...
- Penelope is a _____ heroine, mother, woman because...
- Zeus is a _____ leader/father because...
- *The Odyssey* is an excellent example of an anti-heroic or heroic epic because...
- *The Odyssey* does an excellent/poor job of redefining the nature of heroism because...
- *The Odyssey* is an excellent example of pro-war/anti-war narrative because...

You may propose topics other than these, but regardless of what you choose, your argument **must be** evaluative and you need to receive approval of your thesis statement before you move on to writing topic sentences and choosing evidence. You **may not** argue about Odysseus's leadership skills because we have discussed them at length in class.

Remember: the best evidence is not self-explanatory and requires close reading and interpretation of word choice, figurative language, symbols, and images. You should also choose evidence from varied points in the epic to give a complete sense of the poem and/or character as a whole.

We will go over proper citation of quotations, writing effective topic sentences, the function and importance of the rebuttal paragraph, and ideas for dynamic introductions and conclusions in class. You are expected to take notes and incorporate those ideas into those elements of own persuasive writing.

Important Definitions

Introduction: An introduction is a paragraph that serves to introduce your argument as it works on both the global and the local levels. It also provides your reader with any additional details that are necessary to set up the rest of your essay. You should try to open your essay with a "hook," which is an attention-grabbing first line, and then move into the argument itself. Expressing your argument on both global and local levels may take several sentences. Finally, it is usually necessary to also include some pertinent details from the text (characters, events, etc.) to serve as a "roadmap" for your following paragraphs.

Topic Sentence: This is the first sentence of a paragraph, and it should serve to introduce the topic of that paragraph. You should always avoid topic sentences that offer summary; instead, your topic sentences should work as "mini-arguments" that serve as building blocks for your larger argument.

Larger Significance: After covering your three criteria in your first three supporting paragraphs, add one more paragraph that discusses the larger significance of your argument. Basically, ask yourself the "so what" question--why does your argument matter? How does it change or shape the overall story? What main theme does your argument connect to and what does it say about this theme? Does it change what we understand as the climax? Does it change who we see as the antagonist or hero? What larger point about one of the story the does your argument illuminate? Be creative!

Ideas for Conclusion: Regardless of what you have been taught before, you want to avoid repetition in your conclusion. A strong and persuasive conclusion should offer a new perspective on your argument--perhaps address the role a minor character plays in your argument, connect your argument to a larger historical or literary example, or examine one seemingly random quote or detail that, with some analysis, serves to support your claims. These are just some ideas, but keep in mind that your conclusion is a crucial element of your argument, and your goal should be to end on a powerful note.

How to Cite Direct Quotations from the *Odyssey*: lines from the *Odyssey* should be cited as follows: (line number - line number, Book number (ll. 35-40, X)).