

# Midterm Paper

## *Overview*

One of the goals of this course is to help you learn how to dissect your own intuitions and presuppositions about literature. In this paper you will do just that. Your assignment is to write a philosophical critique of an opinion you held about literature at the start of this course, using your responses to the Reading Journal #1 questionnaire as your source material, and then using this critique to come to a new and clarified position.

## *Topic Choices*

Choose one of the following three topics. The due date of your paper will depend on which topic you choose.

- Midterm Paper #1 (due January 26): Can we learn anything important from literature?
- Midterm Paper #2 (due February 16): Does reading literature make us better people?
- Midterm Paper #3 (due March 15): Can a good work of literature be morally bad?

## *Guidelines*

**Your paper should be between 900 and 1000 words in length**, no more, no less. Your paper should consist of the following five sections, explained in detail below:

1. Quotation of your original opinion (does not count toward word count)
2. Introduction / Clarified statement of your original opinion 50 to 100 words
3. Developed criticism #1 of your original opinion 250 to 350 words
4. Developed criticism #2 of your original opinion 250 to 350 words
5. Revised position 250 to 350 words

### *1. Quotation of your original opinion*

At the top of your paper provide a verbatim quotation of the response you gave to your chosen topic question on the Reading Journal #1 questionnaire. This will serve as your “original opinion”. Retrieve your response by navigating to “Assignments” > “Reading Journal #1” on Quercus, finding the corresponding question on the questionnaire (it will be one of the last three questions), and copying the response you wrote out there.

## 2. Introduction

Your introductory paragraph should be brief and to the point. Begin by indicating the topic question that you will be addressing. Next, present a clarified statement of your original opinion, adapted from the verbatim quotation provided at the top. (This “clarified statement” should be a more concise and precise statement of the essence of the view expressed in your original response. Try, if possible, to paraphrase your original response in a single sentence.) Lastly, end your introductory paragraph by offering a preview of your conclusion, indicating what your revised position will ultimately be.

## 3. Developed criticism #1 of your original opinion

This section should present a specific and developed criticism of (the clarified statement) of your original opinion. This may be done in various ways; for example, you may...

- **object:** present an objection or counterexample to your original opinion, and explain why this objection needs to be addressed
- **clarify:** identify an ambiguity in your original opinion (i.e., a point which admits of two or more readings), and explain why these readings need to be distinguished
- **qualify:** show that your original opinion is valid, but only for a particular subset of cases
- **expand:** show that your original opinion on its own is not a sufficient answer to the question, and requires some other consideration(s) to be addressed

Your criticism need not fit neatly into any of these categories; the above list is intended merely to give you an idea of what I am expecting.

## 4. Developed criticism #2 of your original opinion

This section should present another criticism of your original opinion. This criticism may be of the same form as your previous criticism, but it must develop a distinct and independent point.

## 5. Revised position

The final section of your paper should then use the criticisms you’ve raised in the previous two sections to arrive at a revised position, which responds to and avoids the problems and weaknesses you’ve now brought out in your original opinion. Your revised position may be something quite different from your original opinion, or it may be a clarification of your original opinion; in any case, it should be an improvement on your original opinion. Clearly explain how

you are addressing and responding to the criticisms you've raised, and be honest about any reservations you still have about your revised position.

Note that the revised position you arrive at in the end is less important than how you get there. Your task is to develop a new position via criticism of your original opinion. In other words, it's the progression, not the conclusion, that matters here.

### *Formatting*

**Include no identifying information whatsoever on your paper:** not your name, not your UTORid, not even your student number. (Quercus will keep track of whose paper is whose.)

**Include a word count at the end of your paper.** You will lose credit if a word count is not included.

You do not need to reference any secondary sources for the purposes of this paper, but if you do, be sure to **include a bibliography at the end of your paper**. Your bibliography, as well as your in-text citations, should be formatted in accordance with some standard citation style of your choosing (e.g., APA, MLA).

Beyond the above specifications, your paper may be formatted however you wish, though please remember that it is going to be read by another human (namely, me). A legible font, ample margins, and appropriate line spacing will all be appreciated.

### *Turning it in*

Please submit your paper, in PDF format, via Quercus by end of the night on its due date: January 26 for Paper #1, February 16 for Paper #2, March 15 for Paper #3. ("The end of the night" means 8 a.m. the following morning.) Late submissions will be docked 10% for each 24-hour period after the due date.

### *Grading*

Your paper will be graded on the clarity of its original opinion, the quality of its criticisms, the cogency of its revised position, and the clarity of its writing. The grading rubric I will be using is posted on the Midterm Paper assignment page on the course website.