

**Essay Assignment 1: Speech/Scene Analysis****Due: Tuesday Sept 23 in class****Rewrite due on Wednesday Oct 8 (by 5pm in my office)****Length:** 5-6 pages, double spaced, standard 12 pt font such as Times, one inch margins.

This assignment is intended to get you used to interpreting a text closely. To this end, I would like you to choose a scene or passage from *Hamlet* that you feel raises a question important to the play as a whole. Develop a focused argument that explores this question, making your case through a close reading of the scene in relation to the play.

*Before you write:*

Read *Hamlet* at least twice, carefully noting as you read passages or scenes that most attract your attention, and storing away patterns or connections across the text. Select a passage or a scene, preferably one we have not already discussed in detail in class. (If you do pick one we have discussed, I expect you to do much more than repeat what was said in class). Study it carefully, paying attention to sound as well as sense, thinking about such issues as poetic form, diction, sentence structure and imagery. Consider how the lines reflect a mood, or a theme, the speaker's character, or a conflict. Through this, formulate the question or problem your paper will address.

*Writing the essay:*

Now you are in the position to begin your essay. Please compose a 5-6 page essay in which you discuss how the chosen section works in relation to the play. Be specific and focused, citing the text to develop and support your claims. The task is **not** to go through the passage line by line, listing everything you have noticed. Rather, isolate what you consider to be the most important aspects of the passage. Organise your assertions and observations so that they contribute to a single important claim you want make about the significance of these lines to the play as a whole. That is to say, your careful reading of the particulars of the passage should be directed toward a central thesis or argument.

It is not sufficient to say, for instance, that a specific passage "heightens" or "augments" something the play is interested in. That is a vague thesis that simply prompts the question: so what? You need to have a focused claim that identifies the significance of the issues raised by the play and thinks in specific terms about how the chosen passage contributes to the elaboration of those issues. Since the assignment demands connecting the passage to other parts of the text, you will have to engage with and cite from the rest of the play in order to develop a good argument. Try to move beyond character analysis to make the link between individual moments or actions and the larger issues with which the play is concerned.

*After you write:*

After you have written the paper, re-read and edit it to make sure that you have eliminated typographical and grammatical errors. Examine the transitions between sentence and paragraphs and re-work the paper so that it flows smoothly from beginning to end. To cite from the play follow the convention: 1/ the first time you cite, include a footnote detailing the edition you are using; 2/ thereafter, simply include the citation in parentheses in the body of the text, e.g., (2.3.32-39).

Finally, remember the injunction against plagiarism. If you borrow ideas from elsewhere, or use language from other sources, you are expected to acknowledge explicitly in footnotes or bibliography the nature of your reliance. Such acknowledgement needs to be made not just for direct quotation, but for paraphrasing the ideas of an external source as well.

*Grading:*

The letter grade you will receive for this assignment is intended to indicate roughly how successful your paper was. The final grade on the paper will be awarded to the re-write. In either case, (1) be aware that the paper needs to be technically clean, that is, free of grammatical and typographical errors. If you make more than a few such errors (the exact number will depend upon the gravity of the errors!), you automatically lose any chance of making an A on the assignment. More than a few, and the chances of a B, too, are eroded; (2) recognise that a technically clean paper is not sufficient to earn a high grade. Your grade will depend even more on the quality of the paper: the clarity of its argument; the ability to use textual evidence to make your case; the strength of your insights into the play; and the grace with which you communicate your ideas.