

CRITICAL ESSAY

The point of this assignment is twofold--to do some research on one of the five anchor texts (Invisible Man, Long Day's Journey into Night, Dubliners, Housekeeping, or Night) and to construct an analysis of that text given one of the critical approaches we have been discussing and studying.

To be successful, you must first choose a text with which you are comfortable and research the research that has been done on that work. Remember, your job is to find an approach or an area of investigation that has not already been covered or covered adequately or in the manner you intend. Always the point is make some original contribution to thinking and scholarship.

Obviously in deciding on an approach, consider which may be most fruitful and revealing. You should read, of course, the assigned essays in Keesey and Eagleton, as well as the essays of "application" in Keesey. I also strongly recommend the section in Abrams, as well as those in Ramon Selden's *Readers Guide to Critical Theory*. I also recommend any of the books in the St. Martin's series of critical approaches. Those have illuminating essays of application.

In writing your paper, you must reference works that you use and generally demonstrate a capability in applying the approach you have chosen. Please also remember that there are no "privileged" approaches, though you should have guessed by now that I am less than enthused by the Norman Holland school of "Reader Response."

STEPS IN PREPARING THE CRITICAL ESSAY

- 1) Choose your **text** (always begin with something that interests, intrigues, delights, or somehow seems compelling)
- 2) **Approach**: What critical approach do I want to try?
- 3) **Context**: What is the immediate critical context for my work. This means doing the kind of research you did for the bibliography. Find out what is out there, especially those articles that appear to discuss what you want in a manner similar to yours.
- 4) **Thesis**: What is this paper about?
What do I want to accomplish by writing it?
What specific contribution am I making to the critical context?
Remember to say to yourself: I've got a way of reading this that is just as rich, but different. I am DEBATING, entering the debate, but w/ my own point of view
- 5) What **elements, passages, or evidence** will I hold up for scrutiny?
Which portions of the text?
Why? Why? Why? (Warning--this question will resound endlessly for this and all your other scholarship)
Ask yourself: HOW am I looking at this work? (The answer should relate back to thesis, context, and approach.)

HINTS:

First note your original response---BEFORE you read the criticism.

Create an index of notes for the work (I put mine at the back of the book.)

Hone down the index by deciding what is truly noteworthy.

NOW, go to the scholarship.

Who supports me?

Who dares contradict me?

What is beside the point?

(Note cards are recommended for selecting and annotating critical articles.)

Finally, outline using above steps.