Research paper

The aim of this project is to encourage you (1) to find and read a classic work; (2) to find and read a contemporary, scholarly discussion of it; (3) to understand the work and the article as best you can, and (4) to express your understanding in the form of a short paper (3 pages).

1. You will first need to select one of the great works from which we have read selections in class. There is a list of works inside the back cover of the text.) Then **read it**. **Do not put this off; get started early.** As you will see from this handout, there are many steps to go through, and each one might have unexpected complications. **Get started now.**

2. Next, you will need to find a contemporary, scholarly discussion of some aspect of the text. Here is one easy way to do it:

a. Go to the USU Library's homepage.
b. Under "Find Resources," click on "Electronic Resources & Databases."
c. Under "Subject," click on "Humanities and Arts."
d. There will appear dozens of searchable catalogs of scholarly articles. Some are indicated as best for beginners, such as "Academic Search Premier." Click on one.
e. You will be directed to that catalog database. Look for a "Subject" field, type in the title of the great work you read, and click on the "Search" button.
f. You will have a long list of articles having something to do with that great work. Some of these articles are in journals owned by our library; most are not. But many are available in electronic form. Your job is to find one or a few that sound interesting, and either find them in our library, or read them online.

> BE PATIENT. Sometimes links won't work, or it will be difficult to find the journal in the library. Keep repeating the mantra, "This is a learning experience." Perseverance will eventually get you one of the articles you are seeking.

3. Next, read the article. Most of it you will not understand. Keep in mind that this article is by a specialist, writing for specialists. Still, you should be able to get the general gist of what is being said. If you are completely stumped, then go find another article.

> ANTICIPATE. If you read through the rest of this handout, you will see that you are going to end up writing about whatever the article is about. So if you are reading the article and you have the sense that this is something you cannot or do not wish to write about yourself, then go find another article.

4. Now that you have read the work and an article on it, you can write your paper. Here is how I recommend doing it:

a. Write a 1-page summary and description of the work you read. Think of what you write as an answer to the questions, "So what did you read, and what's it about, and why should anyone be interested in it?" Don't write a simple "First this happened. Then that happened. Then another thing happened. Then everyone died." Instead, your summary should provide a more systematic and interesting overview of the work. Consider this description, from Wikipedia, of Dosteyevsky's novel, *Crime and Punishment*:

> *Crime and Punishment* focuses on Raskolnikov, an impoverished student who formulates a plan to kill and rob a hated pawnbroker, thereby solving his money problems and at the same time ridding the world of her evil. Exhibiting some symptoms of megalomania, Raskolnikov thinks himself a gifted man, similar to Napoleon. As an extraordinary man, he feels justified in his decision to murder, since he exists outside the moral constraints that affect "ordinary" people. However, immediately after the crime, Raskolnikov becomes ill, and is troubled by the memory of his actions. *Crime and Punishment* portrays Raskolnikov's gradual realization of his crime and his growing desire to confess. Moreover, Raskolnikov's attempts to protect his sister Dunya from unappealing suitors, and also his unexpected love for a destitute prostitute demonstrate Raskolnikov's longing for redemption.

That's not the best summary of the novel (excuse me while I go edit it), but at least it offers a big-picture view of what is going on, what the major events are, and some of the central characters and ideas. Aim for this kind of summary.

b. Write a half page description on the particular part or aspect of the great work that the scholarly article focuses on. Maybe the article is on one particular scene, or an element that comes up often, or some important feature of the work as a whole. Whatever the article focuses on, let's call it "the thing." Write about the thing in your own words: your goal is to get the reader interested in the thing even before you offer the welcome news that you have actually read a scholarly article on the thing.

c. Next, write a half page summary of the scholarly article you read. What was the main point? How does this article cast a new light on the great work you read? Again, you do not want to write a "first this, then that" sort of summary. It should be an intelligent, focused summary of the article. Be sure to mention the name of the author, the article, the journal, and the date. (If you can't work this into your summary, just stick the information into a footnote.)

d. Now you have a summary of the work, a description of the thing, and a summary of the article. Next you should write down, in about a page, your own reflections on the work, the thing, and the article. This is your chance to offer your own intelligent opinion on the scholarly discussion you have read. So, in all, the form of the paper is something like this:

I. Here is a great classic work.
II. Here is an interesting feature, or crucial part, of the work.
III. Here is what one scholar says about it.
IV. Here is what I have to say about it.

e. WHAT IF THIS ISN'T WORKING OUT?! There are many reasons why it might be difficult to follow this form exactly, given the great work you read and the article you read. **That is okay**. Don't force it; don't let this form become a Procrustean bed (and if you don't know what that means, look it up).

What you should do, if this isn't working out, is try to put your paper into a form that fits the content. Your paper should include a summary or account of a great work; some discussion of a recent scholarly article; and your own opinion. However you can get that to work will be fine, so long as those elements are included.

f. You are not done yet. What you have completed is the **first draft** of your research paper. Now ideally you should re-write the paper entirely, from beginning to end. Start with a blank page on your computer, and a print out of your first draft. Start again, and pull in information or sentences from your first draft if you want. In all likelihood, you will find new and better ways of saying things, and the separate sections you wrote will come together into a unified whole.

Why do this? It may sound like busywork, but you will discover that thinking through the material a second time and writing your second draft will result in a much better paper -- so long as you don't simply slavishly copy down the same thing you wrote before. It will flow more smoothly and be more coherent. Really. It will. You might also discover new ideas and insights you had not appreciated before.

g. A few further specifications. (1) You should not write some gee-wiz introduction or conclusion, of the form "Crime and Punishment is the greatest novel written since the dawn of time, in any language, whether human or angelic." Just dive in with your summary of the great work, and end when your own opinion has been expressed adequately. (2) Your paper should by typed, and about 3 pages long (between 750 and 1000 words).

h. As with the weekly reports, everything counts -- grammar, spelling, clarity, precision, depth, etc. Have intelligent friends read it and comment on it. Rewrite it again and again if you have to.