Academic Assessment in the English Department

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What is Critical Reading?

The critical reader does not approach a text as the only possible representation of facts or ideas but, rather, always assumes that a given text offers a particular perspective on its subject matter. Literary criticism aims to investigate and explain not simply what a text means but how exactly that meaning is generated.
We tend to forget that until recently the terms [scholar and critic] were considered antithetical: scholars did research and dealt with verifiable fact, whereas critics presided over interpretations and values, which supposedly had no objective basis and therefore did not qualify for serious academic study.

Whereas “academic criticism” had been a contradiction in terms, it suddenly became a redundancy, as criticism, once the province of nonacademic journalists and men of letters, became (with important exceptions) virtually the monopoly of university departments.

Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History*
# THESIS, ANALYSIS AND ARGUMENTATIVE STRUCTURE

- The paper has an insightful and compelling thesis.
- The thesis is clearly stated.
- The paper makes valid interpretive claims.
- The paper engages in analysis rather than summary.
- The paper shows a nuanced grasp of critical and analytical principles.
- The paper addresses the assignment.
- The paragraphs have clear transitions that show how the argument is progressing.
- The paper has an evident and meaningful organization.

# USE OF EVIDENCE

- The paper uses sufficient evidence to support its central claims.
- The use of evidence is detailed and well chosen for the purposes of the argument.
- The use of primary text(s) displays an understanding of form and content.
- Quotations are properly integrated into the body of the paper.
- The use of secondary material is judicious and helps the paper frame or forward the central claims.
- Where appropriate, the paper enters into an ongoing critical debate, considering opposing arguments or interpretations.
- The paper demonstrates the full relevance of the material quoted.

# MECHANICS AND STYLE

- The paper has been proofread and is free of errors related to grammar, diction, and sentence structure.
- The sentences are lucid and the critical vocabulary sophisticated.
- The title offers a clear sense of the topic and argument.
- The critical voice is strong throughout.
- Formatting of the paper (margins, font, spacing, citations) is appropriate.
- The paper is the appropriate length.
Assessment of Learning Outcomes, Department of English (Spring 2015)

1. The paper draws from a sufficient number of sources.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - N.A.

2. The sources are relevant and, when necessary, up to date.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - N.A.

3. The research is effectively integrated into the paper and does not disrupt the flow of the argument.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - N.A.

4. The paper makes clear how the research serves the central argument.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - N.A.

5. The student is able to engage with other scholars’ interpretations.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - N.A.

6. The student maintains his/her critical voice when incorporating other scholarship into the paper.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - N.A.

7. The student is aware of how his/her critical approach is similar to or different from those of the scholars cited.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - N.A.

8. If using theoretical sources, the student is able to apply a theoretical paradigm or discourse productively.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - N.A.

9. The attribution of sources is thorough and consistently formatted.
   - Strongly Agree
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Strongly Disagree
   - N.A.