

2. Exam: Essay Preparation

You must complete a formal essay on the topic of *Hamlet* on the unit end exam. There are a total of four potential essay topics or questions. You will select *one* topic to write about. As we study the play, take special note of those events, characters, etc. that will be useful to you when developing your arguments. Below are the four essay topics:

1). *Hamlet* presents a series of philosophical and existential questions to the audience. In an essay, elaborate on the significance of three of these philosophical questions and explain how these relate to the play's theme. In your essay incorporate three direct references to the text of the play.

You *must* structure your essay in the following way:

- i). In the opening paragraph, identify the three questions you plan to address.
- ii). In the essay's body, dedicate one paragraph to each question. Elaborate on each question's ultimate meaning and/or significance. Draw upon characters, words spoken, events from the play, etc. to help you develop a context for your question.
- iii). In your concluding paragraph, explain how these questions relate to the play's theme.

2). One of the major themes in *Hamlet* is the difference between appearances (what something *appears* to be) and reality (what something actually *is*). In an essay, do two things: firstly, describe how the various characters hide behind masks to conceal their true intentions; and secondly, describe what the characters do to try and figure out what the others are thinking. In your essay include at least three direct quotes from the play.

3). Although Hamlet has a bleak view of humanity in general he is particularly critical of women. Why is this so? In an essay, identify and then elaborate on the causes of Hamlet's misogyny. In your answer make direct reference to both the text and events of the play. Pay specific attention to Hamlet's relationship and interactions with Ophelia and Queen Gertrude.

4). What was Hamlet's greatest character flaw? Some experts say it was his inability to act while others claim it was his idealism. In an essay, identify and elaborate on what you believe Hamlet's greatest character flaw was. In your essay incorporate at least three quotes from the play.

Use the brainstorming pages included at the end of this handout to store your ideas, thoughts and research, etc. related to the various essay questions as they are discussed in class. You will be allowed to bring in your copy of *Hamlet* in to the exam. You will *not* be allowed to bring in any brainstorming pages to the test; it is strongly recommended you prepare your essay in advance, i.e. develop your thesis, body and conclusion, etc. in the weeks leading up to the final exam; however, you are still required to write your actual essay during the designated exam time. You can use book marks, etc. to keep track of the location of quotes in the play. These book marks, etc. cannot have any writing on them whatsoever. If marks are found on these place holders the student will receive an automatic zero on the essay.

ESSAY REQUIREMENTS

- i). Essay is free of logic, spelling and grammatical errors.
- ii). Essay includes a proper introduction (thesis statement), body (including *relevant* supporting information), and concluding paragraph (answering a question posed by your thesis).
- iii). Essay includes a minimum of three direct textual references or quotes from the play.
- iv). Cite quotes using the appropriate MLA format. See below for detailed instructions.

Quotes Four Lines or Greater

If you include a quotation from a play *four or more lines* in length you must present it in block format (see below). Block quotations must be indented five spaces from the left margin. For example:

In Shakespeare's play *Richard III* the main character Richard communicates several important instructions to his troops:

Remember whom you are to cope withal:
A sort of vagabonds, rascals, and runaways,
A scum of Britains and base lackey peasants,
Whom their o'erloyed country vomits forth
To desperate adventures and assur'd destruction.
(V.iii.315-319)

Take note of how to indicate the exact location from where the quote is drawn from in the body of the play, e.g. V.iii.315-319. The first number stands for the act, e.g. Act V (5), the second number the scene, and the last space is reserved for listing the range of line numbers.

Quotes Three Lines or Shorter

Shorter passages are incorporated using linear format; you still need to indicate line breaks when Shakespeare is writing in verse. For example:

In the play *Othello*, the main character Othello recalls, "Upon this hint I spake: / She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd, / And I lov'd her that she did pity them" (I.iii.166-168).

Take note that the final punctuation—a period—is withheld until after the parenthetical citation. The slash marks indicate line breaks in the verse.

Use the next few pages of this handout to store your ideas and research, etc. to help you prepare to write your final exam essay. You will be allowed to bring in the brainstorm sheet to the exam that is directly related to the essay you end up choosing to write. You can prepare your essay in advance, i.e. develop a thesis, body and conclusion, etc. in the time leading up to the final exam; however, you are still required to write your essay during your exam time.

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