

Final Research Paper

A research paper is the semester's most important piece of written work. My goal for each of you is nothing less than the composition of the finest, smartest, most eloquent piece of literary criticism you've ever written. I would like you to think of your paper with a similar kind of ambition. Depending on your own goals and situation, you might think of the paper as something you might turn into a final writing project (if you're a graduate student), or something you might use as a writing sample for a graduate school application (if you're an undergraduate thinking about graduate school), or something you would submit for publication, or simply something you can feel really proud of. I realize that high expectations can sometimes be really stressful. So please know that I will be available to help at every stage of the process, and so will the other members of the class. I am going to ask you to help each other, both inside and outside of class, with these research projects.

This paper will need to formulate and introduce a critical problem (and this means positioning your formulation with respect to previous criticism), take a position that engages the problem, and support its ideas with well-chosen evidence and careful reasoning. The paper should be 15 to 20 pages long and include a works cited list.

The course should guide and inspire the selection of your topic, and I am happy to meet with you to suggest possible directions and potential sources. Ideally, your personal interests, the reading, classroom discussions, your summary and response paper, and your group project will contribute to the development of your paper topic. Although the exact topic of the paper is yours to decide, this assignment asks you to examine in some way the work of Louisa May Alcott and Mark Twain. I imagine that most of you will write about texts on our reading schedule. If you have an inspired reason for wanting to make a reasonable departure from our syllabus (if, for example, you want to write about *Jo's Boys* or *Roughing It*), please let me know.

Below I've mapped out a schedule for this research paper.

Apr 4: Proposals. Hand in a one-page (non-binding) prospectus describing your project.

Apr 6-22: Paper Conferences. Meet with me to discuss your essay.

Apr 11: First Drafts (optional). Hand in to me a complete draft of your paper. This first draft is not required, but it is recommended. If you would like me to read and respond to a draft of your paper, I need to have them on or before April 11th.

Apr 18: First Drafts Returned. I will return first drafts with comments and suggestions.

Apr 25: In-Class Writing Workshop. Bring to class a complete draft of your paper.

May 2: Final papers due at 9:30 A.M