

Your final process essay introduces you to the world of literary research and gauges your reading and thinking about one of the major works we've read together this year. Chances are you've thought quite a bit about some element of that work and developed that thinking into an essay. You'll now probe even more deeply into that work by looking at what scholars have had to say about it, engaging their ideas, agreeing and disagreeing with them. Though ultimately the essay that you'll write comes from your own ideas about the work, you'll find very quickly that there's a great difference of opinion about many aspects of these works. There're no right or wrong answers here, just well- and poorly developed ones. English isn't calculus or physics. English allows varied responses, even contradictory ones, to the same topic and rewards gutsy, informed exploration. So, show you're informed and learn to have confidence in your own understanding and expression.



For this assignment, you'll be required to engage with scholars in a serious way, so you'll have to use JSTOR, the Cambridge Companion Series, and/or a local university library. But you should do no other Googling, and you should certainly do no chatbotting.

STEP 1: DEVELOPING A TOPIC AND WORKING HYPOTHESIS

What makes a good topic? Something of interest to *you* and of importance in the work. Something that grows out of *your* reading of the work. Something that leads to a richer understanding of the work. [Some examples from Seton Hall](#). It may be that when you were reading, you wanted to know more about the history of the critical commentary around the work. Or it may be that you wanted to know more about the life of the writer and how their experiences informed the writing of the work. Or it may be you're interested in the work as a product of its time and place. Any of these topics warrant exploration.

Let's take Balzac's [Pere Goriot](#) as an example.

Let's say that when you read, you noticed that the novel is full of social climbers. So you should ask some basic questions: Why? How does the novel use social climbing? How does the novel describe social climbing? Know the facts. What does the novel do to those who social climb? How might I understand the novel's theme about social climbing?

Before you do any research or read anyone else's ideas, develop your own **working hypothesis**, your claim about your topic based on your reading of the work. You might have noticed, for example, that the novel often compares social climbing with violent acts, even murder. You might also have noticed that nothing good happens to the social climbers: they end up broke and scandalized. Based on these observations about the novel's depiction of social mobility, you can develop a *working hypothesis*:

By using the vocabulary of violence to describe upward mobility in *Pere Goriot* and by showing the horrible fates of upwardly mobile characters such as Goriot and Anastasie, Balzac offers a critical judgment of those who would climb the social ladder.

That's your start, a solid claim to research, challenge, and develop.

I'm looking for spark in your thinking and in your writing. While the obvious always matters, it doesn't always matter in obvious ways. Your essay should be lively and engaging in its thought and its style. Writing, no matter the type, is an imaginative and creative enterprise, a way to discover and understand—and therefore to enjoy. Never forget that. Enjoy yourself as you think and write.

STEP 2: FINDING SECONDARY SOURCE MATERIAL

In some of the essays you'll write next year, you'll need to demonstrate engagement with secondary source material, and while this is not part of the AP curriculum, it's vital you have experience with finding and incorporating secondary material into your own writing. To do this, we'll be using a number of resources. Your free use of online databases is limited to [JSTOR](#) and [Cambridge Companions](#), though you can get to good sources through knowing and careful Google searching: domain spec. [search/site:.edu](#); Google Scholar; Google Books. But be careful when you use Google. You've got to end up with a legit source. With your topic and research question keenly in mind, perform searches in the allowed databases.

For other sources, use old-fashioned books checked out from old-fashioned libraries. University libraries are very cool. Do a search at [Rice's Fondren Library](#). Search your author's name as a subject and your work's title as a subject. See how many books the library holds. Bigger numbers are better.

For periodicals, I'd start my search with JSTOR's Understanding Series since it's easy, fast, and very user-friendly. If you're writing about *King Lear*, for instance, [JSTOR's Understanding Series on King Lear](#) is an invaluable resource in finding relevant scholarly articles and essays for use in your own writing.

The first step in research is to accumulate material and to follow the trail of citations. You want to discover the ways scholars look at your topic. So when you read your first source (and all other sources) pay attention to the citations and to whatever bibliography/works cited pages you see. Scholars are good at documenting their work and each source offers you the chance to find the trail of arguments. Do that by noticing who gets cited. Ideally, you want to know the key points of view on your topic.

As you search, look for articles and books that offer a range of readings/contributions to your topic, articles that open your eyes, in other words. You have your first ideas. Now see what others have to say. Think of the research process as a round-table discussion at which people have different views. Sit at that table.

As you read your sources, pay attention to insightful arguments, especially as they relate to or challenge your hypothesis/thesis. Take full measure of those counterclaims, both as they challenge what you think and as they challenge what other scholars think. Pay special attention to moments of close reading, especially all close readings of passages you've already marked and thought about.

Always ask yourself how one argument stacks up against others. Which do you find more convincing, and why? If you're reading sources in the right way, you will develop a sense of how others think about your hypothesis/thesis and how they advance their position.

Imagine your sources sitting around a table. After reading them, you should be able to construct a graphic that depicts the table, the sources and their claims.

As you push through your research, have your own ideas in the foreground so that you are able to put them in conversation with others'. You might ask yourself:

- How has my main argument changed since my reading of this article?
- What's the most important evidence that this author has in support of her "big point"?
- What questions do my sources not answer?
- What is the most surprising finding of my research?

TAKE NOTES Be sure to look for moments of close reading; to take notes not just on the big conclusions *but also on the details of the arguments*; to focus your information--you don't want disparate notes.

Some mistakes students make when first beginning to take notes: 1) noting pointless or obvious things; 2) noting too much or too little; 3) noting only the general idea, not the more insightful, specific details of the point; 4) noting a quote without fully understanding its meaning; 5) not fully understanding or not thinking about why they're taking a note.

Finding good articles isn't easy, and it's sure not quick. Be prepared to pan a flow of articles to find gold.

FOR THIS ASSIGNMENT, YOU MUST FIND 10 SOURCES (CHAPTERS, ARTICLES, OR BOOKS), BUT YOUR ESSAY WILL BE INTERACTING WITH BETWEEN 3 AND 5. LIST THOSE FROM WHICH YOU QUOTE ON A "WORKS CITED" PAGE; LIST THOSE FROM WHICH YOU DO NOT QUOTE ON A "WORKS CONSULTED" PAGE.

A PRELIMINARY WARNING: For this project, special rules about plagiarism apply. Since you will earn process points and points for the final essay itself, if you commit minor plagiarism, you receive an F for the essay portion of the project but retain the process points; if you commit more serious plagiarism, you receive zero for the entire project, pretty much ensuring that you fail the class. Be moral. More on this later as you begin to write.

STEP 3: DRAFTING THE ESSAY

The opening of your essay introduces your topic and the issues necessary for the reader to follow your argument with ease and clarity. Use the openings of the articles you read as a model. Just as they introduced their topics and issues and provided a frame, the larger concept driving the argument, so should you. The first sentence of your essay sets the topic that opening ¶ introduces. That ¶ will be

longer or shorter depending on what you need to introduce; and it might be the first of two ¶s of introduction. The first might set the topic and frame; the second might more specifically introduce key issues. There's no formula, so don't work yourself up. Clarity and good common sense are principles to follow. Simple.

Once you've introduced your frame/topic/issues, you're ready to begin the argument. Here's where an outline comes into play. The better your outline, the clearer and more specific it is, the better map you've got to write the essay.

Let the units of thinking and argument determine the number of ¶s and their content and length. Remember that all ¶s don't have to be of equal length or serve the same function. You might, for example, write short transition ¶s to move from one topic to another or to sum up your argument before moving to your next idea. Let the argument, the way you make it guide ¶s. And remember that developing ¶s follow the same structure. Use that structure to your advantage.

As you write, integrate your sources in the right way. Your reader should know how and why you're using every quotation and every reference to your sources. That means integrating them and situating primary text quotes just as you've done all year. I'll teach you how to incorporate secondary material within your own ideas.

And follow MLA guidelines for parenthetical citation, being very, very careful to *cite every use of every source* and to be diligent and meticulous in citation. You must make dead clear that you've used a source, which source you've used, and how you've used that source, including whether you've quoted any words or followed the original's sentence structure. Be attentive to [plagiarism](#), which can creep into your essay when you're sloppy. Scholars are an honest lot, always tipping their hats to sources. Follow their lead. The consequences of plagiarism are serious and dire, possibly even mortal.

Final 1500-2000-word essay due 8a, April 29.

Submit as a hard copy and to [turnitin.com](#).

100 points (x4).