

**ENGLISH 5331: MILTON
INSTRUCTIONS FOR PAPER PROPOSALS**

The point of a proposal is (a) to make you think seriously and in advance about what you want to write, and (b) to give you the advantage of comments from me before you have written a wholly misconceived or misdirected paper. You are entirely free to give me two or more possible topics, and we can discuss them.

Things to remember:

1.) First, you'll need to pick a **topic**. The purpose of both the short and long paper is to write a critical analysis of an interpretive problem posed by any of the texts we have read (or will read). Because both papers are relatively short (a short paper is about 5-6 pp.; a long paper is about 8-10 pp.), you should try to narrow down your topic as much as possible.

2.) Once you have decided on a topic, you need to generate a research **problem** that raises a thoughtful interpretive **question** about the topic. Neither paper is intended to be a plot summary, a regurgitation, or a purely subjective reaction; you are arguing for a new and interesting way of reading the text(s).

As a means of formulating a clear problem/question, consider using the following formula (adapted from Booth, et al., *The Craft of Research*):

a.) Name your topic: I am writing about _____.

b.) State your indirect question (and thereby define the condition of your interpretive problem): . . . because I am trying to show who/how/why _____

c.) State the Apayoff@ of your argument, i.e., how your answer will help your reader understand something more important yet (and thereby define the cost of not knowing the answer): . . . in order to explain how/why _____.

3.) You need a sharp, helpful, directive title that states the topic and argument of your paper. An accurate title is far more helpful than a clever one; you are writing a research paper, not a short story or magazine article. I will not read any proposal or paper that comes to me untitled.

4.) You are free to use criticism from books and learned journals, but, unless you choose the literature review/research paper option, you are not required to do so. If you draw on or quote such secondary sources then you must footnote them or include them in a bibliography as appropriate. (Bibliographic citations should follow the guidelines set in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.)

5.) At the time you make a proposal you may well not have any idea of how you will answer your question or structure your paper. You are welcome to include a rough outline, but no outline is required. A proposal@ is an attempt to delimit a subject and establish a way of approaching it. You will probably find that all sorts of things change as you actually try to write. Fine--that is to be expected. But if you try to write without settling on a point, then what you will write is very likely to

be inchoate or worse. The object of the proposal system is to help you think seriously about your writing and give you help in the process.

6.) Proposals can be short (a solid paragraph), but they should be carefully considered and must be typed. Proposals should be submitted in the following format: In the upper left hand corner of the page, supply the following information (single spaced, on separate lines): your name; section (ENGL 5331); my name; date. Double space and provide the title (centered, double spaced, without quotes); double space again and begin the text. The text should be single spaced, left-justified, with 1 inch margins on all sides. Choose any appropriate (i.e., readable) font; the type size should be 12 pt. or 10 pt.

7.) Please give yourself enough time to proof your proposals for errors (spelling, grammar, etc.).

SAMPLE TOPIC PROPOSAL

Dennis and Addison on *Paradise Lost*. Plagiarism, Critical Style, and Criticism as Intellectual Property

I am interested in exploring John Dennis's charge that Joseph Addison's famous *Spectator* essays on *Paradise Lost* were plagiarized from him. Dennis's detailed appreciation of *Paradise Lost* in *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704) is well known. Yet his commentary has been almost entirely eclipsed by Addison's. Indeed, many modern scholars praise Addison for his critical acumen and foresight without mentioning Dennis at all. Is Dennis's charge of plagiarism founded, and, if so, what does the fact that contemporaries and modern scholars have ignored his charge tell us about early Milton criticism and critical practice in early eighteenth-century England? An investigation into this charge will show that Addison's critical style—and not his critical content—allowed him to borrow freely from Dennis without citing him. This incident also tells us much about the status of criticism as intellectual property when the institution of criticism in England was just beginning to emerge.