

Hamlet Paper

Requirements:

1. Four to five pages in length, double-spaced, with proper MLA formatting, including citations and works cited.
2. This paper, which you cannot rewrite, is due on the last day of class, 12/9. Because I need to grade your paper and get it back to you during your final exam period, don't even think about handing it in late. To encourage you in your on-time resolve, your paper score will start with 110 points if you turn it in on time. If, however, you turn it in late, I will deduct 10 points for each day your paper is late.

Paper Topic:

1. Write in detail about one of the Hamlet study questions.
2. By **detail** I mean that you need to explicate the text in the play associated with the question and relate this portion of the text to one or more of the play's themes, being careful to give your interpretation of the theme.

Themes – *Hamlet* is a complex play that raises many complex thematic questions, some of which I've listed below:

1. What is the nature of evidence? While Hamlet, Laertes and Fortinbras all seek revenge, Hamlet's claim to revenge is based on testimony from a ghost that only talks to him. Does the ghost represent truth or deception? How is someone's reaction to a play evidence?
2. How does drama have the power to transform? The First Player captures the pathos of Hecuba; Hamlet uses a play to catch the conscience of a king.
3. What is the difference between love and incest, between love and hate? When does one become the other? Hamlet loves then detests Ophelia and Gertrude. Laertes makes us uncomfortable in his relationship with his sister. Hamlet considers Gertrude's marriage to Claudius an incestuous relationship.
4. What is the nature of action? Hamlet questions why he finds it so hard to act when others are more decisive, more engaged in enterprises less worthy, a player weeping for Hecuba, soldiers dying ". . . to gain a little patch of ground / That hath in it no profit but the name" (IV.4.18-19).
5. What is the nature of death? In his "To be, or not to be" soliloquy, Hamlet ponders the nature of life after death.
6. How is one to deal with a head of state who commits a crime? Hamlet never directly confronts Claudius but instead uses intrigue and Horatio's help to assess Claudius's guilt.
7. How does power affect those near it? While Polonius offers endless advice in the form of circumlocutions to his children and the king and queen, he becomes obsequious with Hamlet. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do the same, and Guildenstern explains the relationship between king and his subjects in Act III (III.3.11-23).
8. Why is Hamlet misogynistic, holding women responsible for what's rotten in Denmark and the world? He mistreats both Ophelia and Gertrude.
9. What is the nature of friendship? Hamlet is quick to assess whether those around him are aligned with the king and queen or with him. Only Horatio is his confidant.
10. What is the nature of madness and how does it offer a cover for Hamlet's actions against Claudius?
11. Is revenge a successful strategy? At the end of the play Horatio is charged with telling Hamlet's story.
12. What constitutes a successful marriage? The Player Queen explains the role of a faithful queen (III.2.131-199).

Grading Standards

NOTE ON USE: These are holistic characterizations – Not all elements must be present to justify a grade; conversely, one or two elements in another grade category may not be sufficient to justify that grade.

A work is defined as Excellent ("of the highest or finest quality; exceptionally good of its kind" -- *American Heritage College Dictionary*)

--ideas are mature, perceptive, original; they contribute something substantial and unique to a discussion of the topic and reflect a thorough understanding of the subject under discussion

--there is a clearly expressed, readily identifiable central focus or thesis

--this idea is logically developed

--support for the thesis is provided by ample, appropriate and effective evidence, including detailed facts, examples, and/or other specific data--all of which is clearly linked to the thesis with a thorough explanation of the significance of the evidence

--supporting evidence is organized into well-developed, coherent paragraphs

--paragraphs will normally contain an introductory topic sentence, followed by more detailed sentences providing the specific evidence

--paragraphs and sentences will have logical and sophisticated transitions

--sentences are complete, fluent, and reflect a variety of structures

--word choice is precise, distinctive, and free of clichés

--errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and usage are minor or absent.

--format and topic meet or exceed assignment guidelines.

B work is defined as Good ("competent;" "of high quality" -- *American Heritage College Dictionary*)

A B paper is very similar to an A paper. It generally does not have the depth and sophistication of an A paper; however, the grammar and mechanics are expected to be very good.

--ideas are somewhat mature and perceptive

--there is a clear central focus or thesis idea

--logic is evident in the development

--support for the thesis varies from excellent to good.

--paragraphs contain some specific evidence, though supporting analysis may not be as thorough as that of an A essay

--transitions are adequate, but not as elegant as those in an A essay

--sentences are complete and clear, varied in structure and mostly free of errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling

--word choice is competent, free of clichés

--format and topic meet assignment instructions.

C work is defined as Average-"competent, but undistinguished" -- *American Heritage College Dictionary*)

A C essay meets minimum requirements for the assignment--length, topics addressed--but does so in a minimal way. Such an essay may not have all of the problems below, but one or more will be apparent, and while one such problem may not necessarily result in a C grade, it might if the problem is the overwhelming in its effect on the paper.

--ideas are routine, predictable, and obvious

--thesis is adequate

--logic is still evident, but weak

--support is minimal, with a few details and/or some obvious generalizations

--paragraphs are meager, minimally developed

--transitions are mechanical---e.g. "first," "second..." --or missing altogether

--sentences are complete, but occasionally awkward

--vocabulary is dull, with occasional clichés, slang, or unclear expressions

--errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation are evident, and some are basic.

--format and topic minimally meet assignment guidelines.

D work is defined as Poor ("not adequate;" "inferior;" "lacking in value;" "lacking in content" -- *American Heritage College Dictionary*)

--ideas reveal limited insight

--central focus or thesis is vague, superficial

--logic is weak or vague

--supporting details are few; generalizations are many

--paragraphs are undeveloped, often incoherent

--sentences are unclear and often require rereading

--vocabulary is imprecise

--errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation are frequent and major

--format and topic may not meet assignment guidelines.

F work is defined as Unacceptable

--ideas are shallow and vague

--thesis is inadequate or simplistic

--development is random and illogical

--support is minimal, unclear, general

--paragraphs lack clear main point; they ramble

--sentences are unclear, poorly constructed, and sometimes nonsensical

--format and topic does not meet assignment guidelines.