THEA 301: History of Theatre II
Salisbury University
Fall 2017

Dr. Matt Saltzberg

Final Paper Guidelines

To complete this course, you will craft an 8-10 page piece of critical writing (double-spaced, 1 inch margins, 12 point font). The topic is of your choosing, but of course you should in some way explore core course concepts. In this regard, it is important to note the difference between a report (“It was cloudy today.”) and scholarship (“It was cloudy today for this arguable reason, based on this research.”). This critical writing is to be just that: critical. It is not meant for you to report information, but rather, via analysis, argue an original line of thought. This is all a fancy way of saying: your paper needs to adopt of point of view – an opinion – about something, supported by evidence in the form of scholarly citations (in Turabian style footnotes). Why is citing the work of others necessary? Because in writing this paper, you are entering an ongoing conversation, and it is important to build upon, refute, or otherwise take note of prior thought on your topic. My goal with this project is to give you the necessary tools to write a first-rate paper that would be suitable for presentation at an academic conference or for publication in a scholarly journal. At the very least, I hope that this paper will serve as a showcase for your writing and research skills. If you ever apply to a graduate school that asks you for a writing sample, my hope is that you would reach for this paper that you are going to produce this semester. I am looking forward to working closely with each of you on this project. We will not do this during class time. We will correspond via e-mail and through scheduled one-on-one discussions in my office. I will do all that I can to help you write the best paper possible, but ultimately, this paper is your responsibility.

Although the final draft is due at the end of the semester, this is something we will work on over the entirety of the semester:

Monday, Sept. 11th

We will visit the library on this day, and have a presentation from Angeline Prichard, the Research & Instructional Librarian who is a liaison to Music, Theatre, and Dance. She will walk us through how to do research in our University Library, and it will be helpful for you to have even the vaguest notion about what you might be interested in writing about. This means you should look ahead in the textbook and on the course schedule. Once you have decided on a general subject area, begin by doing a bibliographical survey. Look for specialized works, including journal articles and edited collections, rather than relying on textbooks, other general works, and websites that may be questionable. How have others treated the subject? What materials are available? Allow a couple of weeks for items that you might have to order through Interlibrary Loan. Be flexible enough to adjust the
parameters of your investigation depending upon what you discover in the course of your research.

**Wednesday, Sept. 13th**

A representative from the University Writing Center will come to class and discuss the services they offer. I spent that past 3 years working in a writing center, and I highly recommend using their services. It is not a place for so-called ‘bad writers.’ As theatre artists, we understand the importance of process and craft. We rehearse a show for weeks. Think of using the writing center as a rehearsal for your final paper. Actually, the process of writing cannot be stressed enough: it involves brainstorming, reading and researching, analyzing, structure-mapping, outlining, drafting, talking through ideas with others, reviewing for clarity, effective usage, grammar, etc.

**Monday, Oct. 2nd**

**Thesis statement and annotated bibliography due** (on MyClasses, by 10:59 a.m.). The thesis statement is a concise rendering of your topic and the argument you are attempting to make. The bibliography should list at least 5 sources, and each annotation should include a brief overview of the content of the source, and the ways in which the source will be of use to you in making your argument. Each student will conference with the instructor outside of class to receive assistance and feedback.

**Wednesday, Nov. 15th**

**First draft of research paper due** (on MyClasses, by 10:59 a.m.). Writing from an outline will help you to develop your ideas in a coherent manner. Write with your audience in mind. In this instance, although I am your literal audience, we will define ‘audience’ as an intelligent, educated theatre artist who may know little about your specific area of focus. You can help the reader by beginning paragraphs with topic sentences and then elaborating with examples. Make smooth transition by such techniques as repetition of key words or the use of the appropriate conjunction (but, indeed, nevertheless, moreover, etc.) The hallmarks of good writing are economy and clarity. Interesting content is achieved through specificity.

**Wednesday, Nov. 29th**

**Peer and instructor reviews of paper due** (on MyClasses, by 10:59 a.m.). It is important to develop the skills to review and critique the work of others. Criticism is meant to be constructive and genuinely assist the author in refining and developing their work. The peer review is not a forum to strut one’s own intellectual prowess or to bully the author into writing the essay the way you would write it, and nor is it a site of judgment. It is, rather, a site of discernment (and also a means to reflect back on one’s own work). Peer reviewers are to look for: clarity of introduction/thesis; analysis and argument over reporting; originality of argument (that the essay doesn’t merely recycle others’ work but rather uses other scholars as a lens through which to explore the author’s own ideas); a
meaningful “Who cares?”; evidence that supports the argument & the overall effectiveness of the argument; a well-crafted sense of organization; the sense that the essay follows standard rules of grammar, punctuation, and Turabian style; and a conclusion that sums up the paper in a way that looks ahead and moves beyond merely restating the thesis. Peer reviews will have been assigned immediately following the draft submission deadline on November 11th. Visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JZO3I5qS5a0&list=PL1AfxBvg5FpJ7k-ajzcJ42X6Fi7dom0_V&index=12 for help on completing the peer review. The completion of the peer review will count towards your Participation grade. Additionally, each student will conference with the instructor outside of class to receive assistance and feedback.

Monday, Dec. 11th

**Final drafts due** (on MyClasses, by 10:59 a.m.).

---

**Some common errors to avoid:**

Perhaps the single most common error in students’ writing is incorrect use of possessives. As a general rule, the possessive of a singular noun is formed by adding ’s, as in “the professor’s obsession.” Note that if a singular noun ends in s, you place the apostrophe outside the s, as in “Tennessee Williams’ plays.” As a general rule, the possessive of a plural noun is formed by adding an apostrophe after the plural s, as in the “the professors’ union.” But, there is one major and potentially confusing exception to the rules for possessives: “it’s” is not the possessive of “it”; “it’s” **always and only** means “it is.” The possessive of “it” is “its.”

Avoid using pronouns without antecedents. If you are writing about a person, for example, the first sentence of a new paragraph should repeat the person’s name before you use “he” or “she” again.

The action of a play is usually referred to in the present tense. Actual events in the past are normally discussed in the past tense. Avoid awkward mixing of tenses within one or the other category.

After the initial reference, always refer to scholars by their last name, and work on integrating your own writing with that of another. For example:

> In his introduction to the Arden Second Series edition of *Midsummer*, Harold F. Brooks declares “The theme of the play is love consummated in marriage.” Brooks later posits that love is also the “subject” of the play, and finally that love is “the work of the whole dramatic action.”
Avoid passive construction. For example, instead of “The character of Laura in *The Glass Menagerie* was based on Williams’ sister,” it is much stronger to say: “Tennessee Williams based the character of Laura in *The Glass Menagerie* on his own sister.”

Spell out numbers below 100 (i.e. ninety-nine for 99, etc.).

In documenting your research, do not limit your citation of sources to quoted material. You should probably document any idea that is not general knowledge. It is better to err on the side of too much documentation than too little.