

## English 110 Final Examination Study and Writing Tips

The exam will have two parts, equally weighted. Below are some study tips specific to each part. At the end of this document, there are a few writing tips for the exam itself.

### Part I: Short Passages

These are short excerpts (for poetry, about 6-8 lines; for prose, about 5 lines) from the works we have read this term. **All the readings on the syllabus** are fair game. You will have a (limited) choice; last time I gave this exam, students were asked to choose 7 of 12 passages.

For each passage, you will be asked to briefly identify the work from which it is drawn (including, where relevant, the title and the author), and then to comment on the significant features of the passage and on its relationship to the work as a whole.

### How to study

- Reread: skimming will usually be fine, if you were on top of your reading the first time around
- Review your class notes and the summary notes online
- Take note of any passages to which I specifically referred in class; there's an excellent chance they are important
- For each work we've read, be sure you know who wrote it, and that you have a general sense of the context that's relevant to it (this could include the period when it was written; the conversations we had about its form; the keywords in the summary notes, among other things)

Being able to say interesting things about the passage and the work is the most important thing; it's harder to do that if you're wrong about when/ where the passage comes from, of course, but the take-away point here is that you should **concentrate on analysis in your studying, not just on memorization**. Questions to ask as you review:

- What is the form of this work?
- What is the context of this work?
- What is important or interesting about this work?
- How might this work relate to the themes of the course?

## Part II: Essay Questions

You will be asked to choose one of several essay questions. Last time I gave this exam, there were 5 essay questions. The topics are comparative, asking you to draw on at least two works we have read this term. You can write about texts you've written about before, but you **must** be sure to include texts you have not written about before, and you should be careful not to repeat yourself too closely.

### How to study

- Reread: focus on patterns, themes, connections
- Review your class notes and the summary notes online, paying particular attention to keywords and frequently-repeated themes
- I often began or ended lectures by linking a work to one we either had just read, or were about to read, so look for those parts of the lectures in your notes
- For each work we've read, think about how it could be connected to other works

You should **concentrate on synthesis in your studying** for this part of the exam; having details to support your arguments is important, but a good analysis will depend on your having kept themes, keywords, and connections in mind.

### How to write the exam

**Plan.** Read the whole examination through. You want to make the following decisions

- Which part will I do first? You might prefer to begin with the section about which you are most confident
- Is there anything in one part that can help me with the other? Remember, you can use the passages in Part I in your essay answer for Part II; you can also read the questions in Part II to remind yourself of some of the key themes of the course, and that might help you in identifying and analysing the passages in Part I

**Don't panic.** If you draw a blank on some of the identification passages, move on. Once you have settled in to your writing, you will probably be able to remember more.

**Don't lean on plot summary.** Your task is **not** to tell me what happened in a given text, but rather, to write analytically about how that text works, or about how it connects to the themes of the course.

**Keep asking yourself "So what?"** If you're not certain whether you're simply summarizing, stop and ask yourself why it matters to say what you've just said. Identifying a rhyme scheme, for example, is a first step; why does it matter that this

scheme is in place? Describing a character's motives is, again, a first step; why does it matter to the novel or play or poem that a character has one set of motives and not another? Your goal is **analysis**, not simple **description**.

**Keep track of time:** it's easy to spend too much time on the short passages. Remember, the two main sections are equally weighted.

