

Your first essay assignment is to write a short paper (about 1500 words, or six pages typed and double-spaced) on Homer's epics, which presents a thesis you have chosen to develop, and then supports it with carefully chosen and analyzed passages from the text. As you know, a thesis is an assertion of the particular idea that your essay will prove – it is a statement, rather than a question; it is detailed, rather than vague; and it is complex enough to require an entire essay for you to make clear the most significant evidence in its support. At the bottom of this sheet, you will find two *suggested* topics: you are encouraged to work on a topic of your own devising, providing (1) it deals with passages that were assigned for reading in both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, (2) it is an analytical essay, proving a specific point, and (3) you clear it with me beforehand. Even as suggested topics, the following are probably too general to be covered fully in a short essay. Therefore, focus on a limited aspect of your topic, construct a developed thesis explaining why that aspect of it is significant, and then design your essay so that each paragraph in it contributes directly to the support of that thesis. And, whether you write on one of the suggested topics or propose your own, remember that your essay must cover both epics, and must confine itself to the assigned readings in each.

Please double-space your essay, do not use a cover page (but put your name at the top of the first page), follow standard MLA format, and submit your essay online only, through the course Blackboard page (at [sjsu6.blackboard.com](http://sjsu6.blackboard.com)), by the beginning of class on the day it is due. Submit your essay as an attachment only, in either doc (Word) or rtf format; all word processors can produce rtf (Rich Text Format) files – if you need help saving your file in rtf in some program other than Word, please ask at the Help Desk or Peer Mentor Center on the ground floor of Clark. Late work can only be submitted to either site by prior arrangement, and there will be a significant delay in its marking and return. Do not email or leave at my office any work for this class, unless I specifically ask you to do so. Corrected papers will be returned online in pdf format. Please keep a copy of all work submitted on disk, and retain all graded work returned until the end of the semester; English majors should save the graded copies of their essays in all department classes, since these will be required for the portfolio in their senior seminar. Please note that many people find it harder to proofread work on a computer screen than in printed form, so you may want to print out your final draft and make corrections to that, before submitting the finished file online. Also note that the file name for any work you are submitting should begin with your last name, first name, course number, and assignment name: for example, "Smith\_John\_125A\_Essay1.doc." Finally, remember that I will also be keeping a copy of your marked work during the semester so that, when you submit your second essay, I will begin by reviewing the technical mistakes you made in the first one, and looking to see if you have made any progress in those areas on the second. You, too, should take the time to review those errors, and improve your writing on the second essay—you know I will be checking.

Your thesis should make clear the specific point to be proved in your essay, and you should develop your paragraphs to prove it. To support your readings and to make your analysis clear, you will need to quote short passages from the texts, integrated into your own prose, which relate to the central claims or themes of your essay; please cite the line numbers for each quotation or group of quotations parenthetically at the end of the phrase or sentence (e.g., "2.347-9" for Book 2, lines 347 to 349), and avoid using long, indented quotations. Using shorter quotations makes it easier to establish what your reading of each is, through discussion and analysis, as well as to employ that reading in supporting the thesis of your essay. Quoting poetry within your sentences requires you to mark the line ends – and you should follow MLA style on this, too. Revise for content and to strengthen your thesis and transitions; proofread thoroughly, even if you use a spell-checker first; and follow MLA style, including a Works Cited list at the end, even if you have only used the class anthology. You are not asked to use secondary sources for this essay, and using them cannot replace or supersede your own analysis of quotations from the text, but if you do use them, follow MLA style in documenting them, as well.

In addition to submitting a copy of the essay by class-time on October 8, you must also submit the essay to Turnitin.com on or before the same date. It would be a good idea to go online and establish your Turnitin.com account before you need to upload your essay, just to make sure there are no problems. Once that account is established, you can link it to the course by using the course number (2787910) and password (Homer). Then, when your essay is ready to be submitted, simply choose "Essay 1: Homeric Epics" and upload your work.

**Human traits and values.** Though much of the action of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* seems to be controlled by the gods, the central drama in each epic is focused on human traits and values – the most obvious of which may be rage (especially that of Achilles in the *Iliad* and of Telemachus and Odysseus in the *Odyssey*). Your assignment is to contrast the two epics by choosing what you think are three such traits or values (possibly, rage and two others), and showing how their presentation, adaptation, use, or outcome is significantly different in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and why you think that difference is of importance to the greater themes and designs of each work.

**Immortal meddling.** The gods can affect events in Homer's narratives in many ways, of course, and often choose to act directly, for example by calming winds or whipping up seas to defeat human purposes. Even more often, though, Homer's gods work indirectly, perhaps by promoting or creating an impression or effect in order to elicit a particular response from humans, by informing or misleading humans in order to get them to act nobly or badly, or even by hardening human hearts or attitudes and not letting them change or repent. We have discussed an example of the latter in Athena's effect on the suitors, before Odysseus slaughters them. Your assignment is to pick two or three cases of divine intervention in human affairs that are somehow paralleled in the other epic, and contrast those parallels in order to highlight the thematic differences between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.