

### Essay #5: Defining the Conversation

---

**SUBJECT:** In your first paper, the subject of your study was the poem you chose from *NITL*. Your subject in this writing assignment is the scholarly, critical conversation about your chosen poem (or author): the conversation that has preceded your entry into it, and the contribution you will make to that conversation.

You will need first to survey the conversation: Has there been much talk about your poem specifically? If not, perhaps about the poet's work generally? What have been the topics of conversation that have interested scholars and critics when discussing this piece or this poet? Can you isolate a specific thread of conversation to which you might add, or perhaps one that has made you rethink your original reading?

As you browse the library's catalogues and databases, isolate at least 10 sources that are representative of the conversation, or one strain of it. Five of these sources should be published within the last 5 years, and may include books, articles in scholarly journals (print and electronic), reviews in reputable periodicals, and articles from academic databases. Internet sources must be thoroughly researched for their accuracy and authority, if you want to include them. (It really doubles your work to try to use these sources well.)

**OCCASION:** For the last 5 weeks we have been exploring how poems work. Now, as we move toward writing critical essays, we are starting to explore how criticism can inform our reading.

**AUDIENCE:** The members of this class are your audience; we are assembled to study poetry and, on this occasion, to discuss how criticism informs a reading of your poem specifically. We are familiar with your experience of the poem, having read your first essay. Now we want to know what others have said about your poem and how that may be opening up to you new readings of the poem (or poet), or new lines of discussion about the poem (or poet).

**PURPOSE:** As you research and write, your purpose is to size up the critical and scholarly conversation about your topic so that you can decide how your response fits into that conversation. Your essay should be designed to help us see a specific thread of conversation about your poem, and your essay should define, summarize, and illustrate that conversation—its specific character, creed, and compass. You can also at this time, introduce to us the contribution you intend to make to that conversation in your next paper—perhaps as a closing gesture.

**LENGTH:** 2 to 3 pages, typed single-spaced

**WORKSHOP:** Bring to class 3 copies of the draft of your bibliographic essay. We will workshop those drafts in class on that date.

**LIBRARY ORIENTATION:** Toby Matoush, our department's librarian, will guide you through the use of several databases customized to our research methods and interests. You will begin your research during this session. We will meet in King Library, room 213.

### Cover Sheet for Essay #5: Bibliographic Essay

*Follow the directions below to prepare your essay for submission. Turn in this cover sheet, the final version of essay #5, and the drafts from workshop.*

1. Locate the sentence (or paragraph) that sums up the your **central argument**. Label this sentence "thesis" in the margin. In the space below, summarize your central argument. (Yes, I am asking you to tell me what your thesis is saying. And, yes, it's a test.)
2. In the margin, label the sentence or sentences that locate "the gap" your writing is trying to close: who is your imagined **audience** and what is your **purpose** here? In the space below, explain your intended audience and purpose: Specifically, what assumptions are you making about what the audience already thinks, feels, knows about criticism? How are you expecting to change the audience's appreciation or perception of criticism? How have you designed this essay (structured it) to close the gap?
3. Choose one of your body paragraphs. Circle the key words in the topic sentence that control the focus and development of the paragraph. Circle the key words in the last sentence of the paragraph that link the paragraph's conclusion to its topic sentence.
4. In the margins, identify two sentences that you feel you executed particularly well, either because of word choice or level of development or effective patterning or punctuation. In the space below tell me what is good about them.
5. Check your Works Cited to be sure you have listed all sources from which you derived information or quotations. Be sure there is corresponding parenthetical reference in the body of the essay. And check to make sure the citation follows MLA format.
6. Tell me one thing you struggled with, or are still struggling with in this paper—one thing you need my help or comments on.