

PAPER GUIDELINES FOR ENGLISH 85 HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Can be about any of the elements of linguistic study as it relates to the HEL. Below are a number of *possible* areas for writing, not actual *topics*. A topic must be narrow and capable of sustainable discussion in a short time (5-7 pp).

- semantics: semantic histories or changes
- phonology and phonetics: vowels in ME->EModE: why?
- morphology: leveling and loss of inflections
- grammar and syntax: the shift from a synthetic to a more analytical language
- sociolinguistics: law, literature, food, politics, love and gender relations, governance, domestic life, food, gender (natural, grammatical and notional).
- dialects and variations in OE, ME, EMod or PDE
- historical linguistics or philology: the history of the discipline of linguistics, i.e. comparativists such as William Jones, Jacob Grimm; Saussure and the influence of Structuralism on the history of the language.
- debates over language change and its consequences.
- Lexicography
- The trend to standardization
- “Non-standard” Englishes
- Slang, and various other variations in the language.

I have found that it helps to be able to state your topic as a question - this gives you clarity about your task (see below).

Content: This assignment goes beyond mere summary, and into analysis, but it is in no way intended as a full scale research paper (impossible in 5-7 pages). Any sources you do cite should be noted in parenthetical page citations and a “Works Cited” page.

Format: see the English Department’s “Format and Style Sheet” document and follow its guidelines. Expected length is 5-7 pages, double spaced, with a normal font (12 pt. or smaller).

Due Dates:

Topic due **April 3 in class**. This document includes:

- A statement of your topic in the form of a question
- A description of what you hope to learn or find out
- A preliminary list of sources or references
- A preliminary list of ideas or outline

I will respond to your initial topic via email and offer suggestions on narrowing your topic, suggestions for reading, or other suggestions intended to be helpful.

Final Copy: **April 25 11:59:59 PM (via email)**

Criteria for Evaluation

Content: Basically, how well did you demonstrate your understanding of the the problem, issue or question, and how successful were you in finding a method and mode of response appropriate to your essay? An **A** paper will show great precision in analysis, argumentation; original thinking¹ is the hallmark of an excellent paper. A **B** paper balances the need for clarity with the complexity of the ideas discussed, and will make solid and insightful observations. A **C** paper will conform to the strictures of the assignment, but the response may be lacking in evidence, argumentation, or detail.

Grammar, usage, mechanics and format: The writing should be clear and unencumbered with mechanical errors, citation errors, misspellings or typos. A superior paper will have excellent, publishable-quality prose that shows variety, balance, and invention (eschewing clichés and stock-phrases like “at the end of the day” etc.)

¹ A note on “originality”: Recognizing that we are dealing with a great deal of data and a long history of interpretation of the data, and given the limits of the assignment, this is not primarily intended as a re-search paper. In other words, it is unlikely that you will be able to reach any “new” conclusions on your subject (though you might!). But, where there are major disagreements on the evidence, you should note them and feel confident enough in your knowledge of the topic to have an opinion of your own, and state it clearly. In other words, be not afraid to have your own ideas.