

## Guidelines for Term Papers in Literature Classes

### Objectives

The term paper in literature classes serves to evaluate, in written form, your skills in analyzing and interpreting literary texts: your ability to develop your own interpretation on the basis of a specific question while working closely with relevant primary and secondary texts. The term paper also shows your language skills and general academic skills, such as using appropriate methods and concepts and building a coherent, convincing argumentation.

### Finding a Topic

You need to agree on a topic with your instructor in their office hours. (Discussing topics via e-mail may be possible in advanced seminars; follow your instructor's guidelines.) Term papers about topics not previously agreed upon will not be accepted and you will fail the class.

Finding a topic is part of your task, i.e. you will not be provided with a topic. Your topic needs to meet the following criteria: it relates to the topic of the seminar, it focuses on relevant primary texts, it pursues literary and/or cultural studies (rather than history, psychology, or the like), and it explores a specific question.

### Research Question and Thesis

You need to be able to phrase your topic as a question, your research question. The answer that you work out in the paper is your overall thesis. The thesis must be stated explicitly, as a declarative sentence, in the introduction. In the rest of the paper, you substantiate this thesis by presenting clear arguments and supporting these arguments with references to primary and secondary texts; you want to convince the reader why you interpret a text in just that way. Both a clearly formulated research question and a thesis in which you offer a possible answer are essential to your paper.

### Structure

A term paper is divided into an introduction, several analytic chapters, and a conclusion.

The introduction briefly introduces the subject to the reader, explains its relevance, and states the research question that the paper will pursue. It also explains how the paper will do so: which approaches or methods it will use and in what steps it will proceed. The introduction ends with a declarative sentence that states the paper's thesis. In advanced seminars, the introduction also positions the argumentation of the paper in current research debates (see Using Research Literature).

The main part of the paper consists of analytic chapters that define the central analytic concepts and examine primary texts to answer the research question and substantiate the thesis. This can either be done by going through several texts one after the other (devoting one chapter to each text) or by identifying important aspects of the topic and examining how these aspects are negotiated in one or several texts (devoting one chapter to each aspect). Papers structured by aspects are often more successful. Each chapter should be several pages long. Short papers do not usually need separate chapters.

The conclusion summarizes the most important results and may point to further lines of inquiry. Taken together, the introduction and conclusion make up around 10-15% of the paper's total length.

### **Using Research Literature**

Writing a literature paper involves researching secondary literature and developing your own argumentation in conversation with this scholarly debate. Papers that do not cite any secondary literature will not be accepted. The scope of secondary material varies greatly, but as a rule of thumb a paper in literary studies should reference at least five secondary texts (usually more). The secondary texts should be as specific and relevant to your central question as possible. Thorough research in relevant databases (especially the MLA Bibliography and JSTOR) is therefore vital. Quotations and arguments from secondary texts should be used to support your own argumentation, not to replace it.

In advanced seminars, you will need to position your topic in scholarly debate. Include a paragraph or two that summarize the key arguments on your topic in secondary literature. Then explain how your own paper relates to these arguments and what it adds to them.

All sources you use—no matter if you quote from them, summarize them, or just adopt arguments or ideas from them—must be cited in the text and listed in the bibliography. If you fail to cite even one of your sources, or if you pass off someone else's words as your own, you will fail the course for plagiarism. Repeated cases of plagiarism can result in exclusion from your course of study. Together with your paper, you must submit a completed and signed copy of the "Obligatory Declaration of Academic Integrity."

### **Length and Form**

- Length: 3500-4000 words in introductory seminars, 6000-7000 words in advanced seminars. (This corresponds roughly to 10-12 pages for the introductory seminar and 15-20 pages for the advanced seminar)
- Line spacing: 1.5
- Page margins: 2.5 cm on each side
- Font: Times New Roman
- The paper needs a cover page as well as a table of contents that lists the chapter titles with their respective page numbers (see examples below). Page count starts at page 1 with the introduction. (Short papers usually do not need a cover page or table of contents; please follow your instructor's guidelines.)
- Citation and bibliography need to follow the standards of the Modern Language Association (MLA), 8th edition. You can find the guidelines here (see also examples below):  
[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/mla\\_style/mla\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/mla\\_general\\_format.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_general_format.html)

**Language**

The paper is to be written in English and the language level is one of the evaluation criteria. Carefully proofread the paper and use the spellchecker of your computer to ensure correct grammar and spelling. Aim for an academic register and style. Avoid slang and employ appropriate terminology. Your diction should be analytical and objective while being clear and comprehensible.

**A Few Do's and Don'ts**

- Avoid plot summaries. They have no analytical merit whatsoever and will therefore lower your grade. Reference to the plot should only be made in support of analytic argumentation.
- Biographical facts about the author are usually irrelevant to literary analysis. Under no circumstances should you include a chapter detailing the author's biography.
- Do not try to include everything you know about the topic into the paper. Build a deliberate line of argumentation and make sure everything you mention relates directly to your research question and thesis.
- Explain at the beginning and end of each chapter what the chapter argues and how that relates to the overall topic and thesis.
- Each paragraph in the chapters should discuss a particular aspect of your argumentation. Beware of paragraphs that are only a few lines long. This means either that you are making too many paragraph breaks or (more often) that your argumentation on this point lacks detail or depth.
- Try to avoid generalizations. Argue as specifically as possible and base your arguments on existing research. Very few statements are wholly self-explanatory.
- Avoid morally judgmental or overly personal statements. Your paper is an academic study. Academic studies need to keep analytical distance to their subject.

Universität Konstanz  
Fachbereich Literaturwissenschaft  
Semester  
Course Title  
Instructor

# Title

Date of Submission xx.xx. 20xx

Name  
Matriculation Number  
Program  
Semester  
e-mail address

Universität Konstanz  
Fachbereich Literaturwissenschaft  
Wintersemester 2017/18  
Slavery in American Letters  
Dr. Eva Gruber

**“Anything dead coming back to life hurts”:  
Beloved’s Function in the Process of Remembering a  
Traumatic Past in Toni Morrison’s Novel *Beloved***

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## 2. Trauma in the Aftermath of Slavery

“This is not a story to pass on” (Morrison 324). With these words, Toni Morrison finishes her novel and once more leaves the reader puzzling about the intended meaning of what he just read. There is a contradiction in this quote, stating that the story is not a story to pass on, at the end of a novel that does exactly that: pass on the story of the historical person Margaret Garner (see Rody 93) and on a higher level, pass on the African-American history of slavery: “[...] she [Morrison] seeks to make slavery accessible to readers for whom slavery is not a memory, but a remote historical fact to be ignored, repressed or forgotten.” (Sanders Mobley 19). Therefore, the ending of the novel can be interpreted by means of irony. This is not a story to pass on, but nevertheless, it has to be passed on (see Krumholz 95; Plasa 25) in order to be remembered.

*Beloved* contains many characteristics that James Olney identified for the traditional slave narratives (see Sanders Mobley 19f.). It tells the story of Sethe, a mother who lived under the cruelties of slavery and now suffers from its aftereffects. The novel provides “information about parents, siblings, the cruelty of masters, mistresses and overseers, barriers to literacy, slave auctions, attempts, failures and successes at escaping, name changes, and general reflections on the peculiar institution of slavery” (Sanders Mobley 19f.).

However, there are also differences between the traditional slave narratives and the novel *Beloved*. Whereas slave narratives focus always on portraying historical facts in an authentic and chronological way (see Sanders Mobley 20), Morrison does not have that strict claim, neither for factuality, nor for chronology as she states in the foreword to *Beloved*:

The historical Margaret Garner is fascinating, but, to a novelist, confining. Too little imaginative space there for my purposes. So I would invent her thoughts, plumb them for a subtext that was historically true in essence, but not strictly factual in order to relate her history to contemporary issues about freedom, responsibility, and a women’s ‘place.’ (*Beloved* Foreword XI)

According to Morrison, the traditional slave narratives are not able to show the interior lives of the slave - narrators as things that were too shocking or terrible were left out for the Abolitionist cause (see Matus 104). Thus, Morrison's purpose that she refers to in her quote is to draw attention to both, the physical, as well as the psychological consequences of slavery, especially for women (see Sanders Mobley 20). Thereby, Morrison wants to fight what she calls “national amnesia” (Taylor Guthrie 257). This term describes the phenomenon that slavery is a period of history that nobody wants to remember, because it is so terrible. In her novel, Morrison succeeds very well in showing both, the terrible consequences of slavery for

## Bibliographical Guidelines

### Book by a single author

In-text citation: (Author Page)

If more than one source by the same author: (Author, *Short title* Page)

#### Bibliographical Reference:

Last Name, First Name. *Title: Subtitle*. Publisher, Publication Date.

Eyerman, Ron. *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

### Book by more than one author

In-text citation: (Author and Author Page)

#### Bibliographical Reference:

Author 1 (Last Name, First Name), and Author 2 (First Name Last Name). *Title: Subtitle*. Publisher, Publication Date.

### Anthology

Last Name, First Name, editor. *Title: Subtitle*. Publisher, Publication Date.

Connor, Marc C., editor. *The Aesthetics of Toni Morrison: Speaking the Unspeakable*. University Press of Mississippi, 2000.

### Essay in Anthology

In-text-Citation: (Author Page)

If more than one source by the same author: (Author, "Short title" Page)

#### Bibliographical Reference:

Last name, First name. "Title of Essay." *Title of Collection*, edited by Editor's Name(s), Publisher, Year, Page range of entry.

Rushdy, Ashraf H. A. "'Rememory': Primal Scenes and Constructions in Toni Morrison's Novels." *Toni Morrison's Fiction: Contemporary Criticism*, edited by David L. Middleton, Garland, 1997, pp. 135-161.

### Essay in a Scholarly Journal

In-text-Citation: (Author Page)

If more than one source by the same author: (Author, "Short title" Page)

#### Bibliographical Reference:

Author(s). "Title of Article." *Title of Journal*, Volume, Issue, Year, pages.

Rody, Caroline. "Tony Morrison's *Beloved*: History, 'Rememory,' and a 'Clamor for a Kiss'" *American Literary History*, vol. 7, no.1, 1995, pp. 92-119.

## Article in an Online Magazine or E-Journal

In-text-Citation: (Author “Short Title”)

### Bibliographical Reference:

Author(s). “Title of Article.” *Title of Magazine or Journal*, if available Volume, Issue, publication date, URL, and the date of access.

Carney, Jo Eldrige. “Being Born a Girl: Toni Morrison’s *Desdemona*.” *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2014. <http://www.borrowers.uga.edu/1217/show>. Accessed 24 September 2019.

## Dictionary Entry (und andere Nachschlagewerke)

In-text citation: (“Short Title”)

### Bibliographical Reference:

“Entry.” *Dictionary Name*, Publication Date, Publisher, Page (print) or Access Date and URL

“Trauma.” *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 24 Sep. 2019, <https://ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=trauma>

## Film

In-text citation: (*Title*)

### Bibliographical Reference:

*Title*. Directed by, film studio or distributor, release year.

*Beloved*. Directed by Jonathan Demme, Touchstone Pictures, 1998.

## TV Series

In-text citation: (season.episode (HH:)MM)

### Bibliographical Reference:

For listing an entire show: Creators. *Title*. Production Company, Distributor, Date.

Lisa Joy and Jonathan Nolan, creators. *Westworld*. Jerry Weintraub Productions, Kilter Films, Warner Bros. Television for HBO, 2016-.

For listing individual episodes: “Episode name”, *Series*, creators and directors, Season and Episode, Production Company, Distributor.

“The Bicameral Mind.” *Westworld: Seasons 1-2*, written by Lisa Joy and Jonathan Nolan, directed by Jonathan Nolan, season 1, episode 10, Jerry Weintraub Productions, Kilter Films, Warner Bros. Television for HBO.

**For other common sources and more detailed instructions see:**

[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/mla\\_style/mla\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/mla\\_general\\_format.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_general_format.html)