

English 6393-14166  
Research Methods in English  
Fall 2011  
T 6-9 pm  
Irby 303

Dr. R.-J. Frontain  
Office: Irby 317 G  
Office Hours: MW 12-2 pm  
T 1.30-2, 4.30-6 pm  
Th 1.30-3 pm

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Research Methods in English is as much an overview of the profession of English as it is a practicum for recognizing the authority of texts and the issues surrounding their presentation to readers. Students will develop a basic methodology for editing and annotating a text, for researching historical and linguistic contexts, and for resolving troubling interpretive ambiguities. In the later part of the semester, attention will be paid to the ways in which the electronic dissemination of primary and secondary texts are altering the expectations of readers, the resources protected by our libraries, and our methods of research. Above all, students completing the course should enjoy an enhanced appreciation of the role that they play as scholars in the larger dialogue that we call “culture.”

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## TEXTBOOKS

John Donne, *The Major Works*, ed. John Carey (Oxford UP, 1990, rev. 2000)  
D. C. Greetham, *Textual Scholarship: An Introduction* (Garland, 1994)  
Peter Stoicheff and Andrew Taylor, eds., *The Future of the Page* (U of Toronto P, 2004)  
Peter L. Shillingsburg, *From Gutenberg to Google* (Cambridge UP, 2006)  
*MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Modern Language Association of America, 2009)

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## SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

T 30 Aug. Overview of Course; Introduction to Textual Editing  
For next week: prepare articles in handout on editing John Donne’s poetry

### Unit I: The Reliability of the Text

T 6 Sept. Editing John Donne  
For next week: Stoicheff and Taylor, chaps. 1-5

T 13 Sept. Discussion of Stoicheff and Taylor  
For next week: Paper #1 (5-7 pages): Choose one poem by Emily Dickinson and contrast the representation of its text in early printed form, Johnson and Franklin

### Unit II: Annotating a Text

T 20 Sept. Introduction to Textual Annotation

For next week: choose a writer who interests you and complete an initial survey of biographical resources

### Unit III: Biographical Criticism versus Biographical Context

T 27 Sept. Introduction to the Issues of Biography in Criticism

For next week: identify the way(s) in which biographical criticism has affected study of your chosen author

T 4 Oct. Discussion of case studies

For next week: Paper #2 (5-7 pages): Analyze the biographical fallacy in the interpretive tradition surrounding a text of your choice and demonstrate, rather, how focus upon the biographical context is more productive

### Unit IV: Interpretive Cruxes

T 11 Oct. The Gordian Knots of Criticism, Pressure Points in Interpretation: Samples

For next week: choose a text that offers a particular interpretive challenge and assemble a working bibliography of scholarship on that crux

T 18 Oct. Discussion of case studies

For next week: Paper #3 (5-7 pages): Analysis of a debate concerning an interpretive trouble spot in a text

### Unit V: Identifying Echoes

T 25 Oct. The Nature of Textual Conversations

For next week: identify a pivotal allusion in a text that requires scholarly amplification

T 1 Nov. Discussion of case studies

For next week: Paper #4 (5-7 pages): Analysis of the ways in which a primary text is informed by its source text

### Unit VI: Gender Issues

T 8 Nov. Gender and the Production and Dissemination of Texts

For next week: identify a subject/theme undertaken by both a male and a female writer

T 15 Nov. Discussion of case studies

For next week: read Stoicheff and Taylor, chaps. 6-12

### Unit VII: Future Shock: Electronic Texts and Research

T 22 Nov. Oral, Written, Printed, and Electronic Texts: Changing Paradigms  
For next week: Shillingsburg

T 29 Nov. Discussion of electronic issues; *MLA Handbook*  
For next week: identify a journal that has particular authority in your field of study

### Unit VII: The World of Scholarship

T 6 Dec. Overview of the scholarly life  
For next week: Paper #5 (5-7 pages): History and charism of a scholarly journal

T 13 Dec. FINAL EXAMINATION PERIOD: Reports

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### PAPER ASSIGNMENTS

There will be five (5) papers for the course, each 5-7 pages in traditional typescript format (12 point type, double spaced, with one-inch margins, and respecting MLA documentation guidelines).

Paper #1 will analyze three (3) versions of an Emily Dickinson lyric in terms of its textual variants. For this purpose, the Scholars' Facsimile edition of the first printings of Dickinson, as well as the Thomas H. Johnson and R. W. Franklin editions of Dickinson's complete poems, have been placed on reserve in Torreyson Library. The student should pay close attention to the "accidentals" of publication (that is, variations in spelling and punctuation), and most particularly to differences in word choice. After analyzing the variants, consider the reasons for these differences.

Paper #2 will analyze the biographical fallacy in the interpretive tradition surrounding a text of the student's choice (e.g. Kosofsky Sedgwick's reading of Henry James's "The Beast in the Jungle" in terms of the author's closeted sexuality) and demonstrate, rather, how focus upon the biographical context is more productive in the interpretation of that text. In advance of writing the paper, the student should familiarize him/herself with the major biographies of that author, as well as the ways in which fascination with the author's life has illuminated or overclouded a critical aspect of his/her work.

Paper #3 will analyze a debate concerning an interpretive crux in a text of the student's choice (e.g. the "two-handed engine" of Milton's "Lycidas"). In advance of writing the paper, the student should prepare a bibliography of the principal arguments concerning interpretation of this trouble spot. The paper should weigh the value of the competing proffered solutions and, to the extent that the student is able, conclude with the student's own solution to the problem.

Paper #4 will analyze the critical ways in which a primary text of the student's choice is influenced by- -or has been written in response to- -an earlier text. Keep in mind that in a 5-7 page

paper, one cannot analyze the multivarious ways in which Joyce's *Ulysses* engages with Homer's *The Odyssey*. Rather, focus upon the significance of an echo that can be fully analyzed in the space allotted (for example, consideration of the implications that Alan Hollinghurst's using a phrase from Milton's "Lycidas" to title his novel, *The Folding Star*).

Paper #5 will survey the history of an academic journal of the student's choice in order to analyze its particular charism and assess its place in the development of literary scholarship. The student might consider if the journal enjoyed a particular heyday and, if so, what that indicates about changing critical trends or (if the journal is dedicated to study of a single author) fluctuations in an author's reputation. Or the student might initially survey tables of contents to tabulate changing critical terminologies and scholarly styles.

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## OBSERVATIONS

1. Scholarship is the primary way in which readers take part in the ongoing dialogue about meaning and value that we term "civilization." It is a vital, life-enhancing activity for persons who hope to lead a deliberate life. People who find scholarship "dull" are invariably the emotionally shallow denizens of Plato's cave who abjure the three-dimensional life of the mind in order to focus their attention on such two-dimensional shadows as the Kardashians and other manufactured instances of "reality" television. Any student who, stone-cold sober, does not find literary scholarship deeply intoxicating should consider pursuing an M.B.A. degree instead.
2. As an indication of the depth of one's commitment to scholarship, one will of course arrive on time for every class meeting and be exquisitely well prepared.
3. The instructor prepares to return papers in private conferences, during which he and the student may also brainstorm about the next paper. Once the class has submitted the first paper, we'll try to set up a standing conference appointment for everyone. The instructor understands, however, that this may be difficult for students taking a night class specifically because they have daytime obligations.
3. The final grade will be computed roughly as follows. Each of the five papers will be worth 20%, with a slightly heavier weight being given to the later papers.