GREAT WORKS RESPONSE GUIDELINES

Basic Requirements

- Write ONE response from EACH of the six Great Works categories: literature, art, film, music & dance, theatre, and science & technology. (2015 graduates may write two 3-4 page responses or one expanded response per category.)
- Expanded responses are typically between six and eight pages in length (double-spaced).
- Papers written for other classes can be submitted as Great Works Responses but must be revised to conform to the response requirements outlined below.
- If you choose to base your response on a paper written for a class, please note it on your response. If you do not, your response runs the risk of being marked as plagiarism when we perform an online check.

Purpose of Great Works Responses

The Great Works Responses should accomplish three tasks:

- Provide historical and contextual background for the work.
- Critically examine content and structure of the work.
- Briefly discuss the significance of the work to the world and, where applicable, to you personally.

Historical Context

1. **Includes essential factual details necessary to identifying the work.** What is the title of the work? What is the name of its author/creator? When was it created? What other basic pieces of information does the reader need to know? For example, if you are writing about a Shakespeare play, did you only read the text, or did you attend a live production? If it was a live production, when and where did you see it? Who produced it?

2. **Evidences an informed understanding of the work’s context—not just a superficial recap.** The information you present here should go beyond the brief and superficial intro found in the first few lines of a Wikipedia entry. Give the reader a substantial sense of the work within its context. This may include explanations of relevant historical, political, biographical, social, or cultural detail significant to the creation and/or reception of the work.

3. **Provides “backstory” to the work that not only situates the work and its significance, but sets up the critical analysis.** Whether or not you choose to use subheadings in your Great Works Response, your paper should be cohesive, meaning that the paper should feel focused, not fragmented. The historical information should therefore transition smoothly into the analysis section. When you are writing the historical context section for this paper, consider the focus of your critical analysis. What background information does your reader specifically need to know to fully understand the angle you will take in the analysis section? How can the information in the historical context section help prepare the reader for and transition the reader to the analysis section?

Critical Analysis

1. **Anchored by a clear and focused thesis/argument that tries to move beyond self-evident observation.** The analysis should have a focus narrow enough so that you can cover your topic in sufficient detail and depth. The best critical analyses move beyond what a superficial examination of the work would reveal. Is the focus of your analysis something that most people could easily observe within the work? Does it seem somewhat obvious? If so, try to go deeper or to approach the work from a different, more unique or more interesting angle.

2. **Uses ample evidence from the great work to substantiate thesis.** Claims that you make in your thesis are only empty claims until you substantiate them. Make sure you support the thesis of your analysis with specific detail from the work itself. Supporting details show close observation and depth of thought will substantiate and validate your thesis. They will also provide points of interest for your reader.

3. **Draws conclusions by considering significance of the work in a deeper or larger context.** Once again, your GW Response should make it clear to the reader that you have given serious thought to the work about which you are
writing. Are your observations somewhat surface or one-dimensional, or do you give the reader insight to a thought process that digs a bit deeper?

4. **Manifests logical and clear organization in the presentation of supporting points.** As you write your analysis, make sure you transition from point to point in a way that makes sense for your reader. Avoid unfocused rambling or jarring transitions between supporting points that seem totally unrelated.

The Big Picture

1. **Moves beyond a cursory gut reaction to the work, and instead discusses the importance of the work in a broader context.** Now that you have analyzed a specific aspect of the work, you have the chance to let the reader know what it all means on a bigger scale. Why is this work important? Why does it matter? Why should we care about what you discovered in the analysis? What does it tell us or teach us? How does it contribute to our understanding of life or our world or what it means to be human? You don’t have to answer EVERY question, but you should address the broader importance of the work.

2. **Responds to the “big questions” posed/answered by the work (if applicable, in a personal context).** What questions does this work pose to you and to a broader audience? Does it challenge our assumptions? Does it question certain ideas or beliefs? Does it demand a response? If you feel a specific personal connection to the “message” of the work, let the reader know how that personal connection informs your approach to the work.

3. **Shows sincere investment in trying to personally make sense of the work rather than settling for glib/superficial moralizing.** Avoid cliché observations about the work. Stay as honest and genuine as possible. Don’t exaggerate your response to the work (for good or bad) or make vast religious pronouncements. Keep things specific, direct, and thoughtful.

Scholarship

1. **Evidences mature and insightful ideas consistent with a solid understanding of the work.** Throughout the paper, the reader should get a sense that you really came to KNOW the work. This will become clear as you present deep and thoughtful ideas, and as you avoid making hasty or superficial judgments about the work.

2. **Utilizes secondary sources.** Although your analysis and concluding section may be entirely your own original work, you will undoubtedly need to consult secondary sources for some background information on the work. The more credible your sources, the more credible your paper as a whole, so while it’s not utterly forbidden to consult Wikipedia, a reader who sees that Wikipedia is your ONLY outside source may wonder how much time and research you really devoted to the development of your paper.

3. **Secondary sources are cited accurately and consistently.** Different fields of study use different bibliographic citation styles, but whichever style you use (for example, MLA, APA, Turabian, etc.), your sources need to be cited correctly, and the citation style needs to be consistent throughout the paper.

4. **Written in a clear and appropriate style.** This is a paper for an academic audience, so excessive slang or informal language is out of place. The writing should be easy to follow and well crafted, not just a stream-of-consciousness ramble.

5. **Free of typos and grammar errors.** Make sure you carefully proofread your final paper before you submit it for evaluation. Excessive errors in grammar and mechanics obscure the content within the paper.