

INFERNO EXERCISE (CREATIVE WRITING AND SOME RESEARCH)

English 201

Due Date: As listed in the syllabus.

Length: This short essay is to be a full 3-4 full pages in length not counting the Works Cited page. You may choose only fonts such as Times or Times New Roman at font size 12. Do not exceed or fall short of this page length. Essays that use other fonts than these approved ones in order to artificially "stretch" the paper length will suffer penalties.

Format: The essay should be typed or word-processed on high quality paper (no onion-skin paper or semi-transparent bond paper, please). Aim for a professional appearance. It should be written in the Modern Language Association format (MLA). You may find it useful to peruse the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th edition, for more information. A sample first page and sample Works Cited page can be downloaded in PDF format from the class website under the "Research" link if you did not receive a sample in class. In the upper left-hand corner of the first page, please include the following material flush against the left margin: your name, your teacher's name, the course, and the due date of the final project (not necessarily the date you finished the work). Here is a generic example:

Jane Doe
Professor Wheeler
English 201-C
23 January 2014

After typing such material in the upper left-hand side of the first page, you should double-space and center the title of your composition. Be original. Be memorable. Make your title count. Note that the title of your own unpublished essay need not be underlined, italicized, or placed within quotation marks. Follow normal MLA conventions for capitalization.

The body of your essay should be double-spaced and left-margin justified rather than fully justified (i.e., your right margin should be a "ragged right," with uneven edges.) Maintain one-inch margins all around the essay. On every page *including the first*, insert a header with your last name and the page number. By viewing "header" on most word-processors, you can set up your document automatically to include such a header on each page. Your Works Cited page should also be paginated.

If students incorporate outside research beyond the primary text, they should use peer-reviewed sources for their paper. Sample resources might be a particular book, a journal article in hardcopy, or a journal article as contained in a scholarly database. The key element here is to find peer-reviewed, scholarly material whenever possible

rather than random educational webpages. If you don't know whether a work is peer-reviewed, bring a copy to me and ask. JSTOR and the MLA International Bibliography are two good spots to find peer-reviewed works on this topic.

"Abandon All Hope, Ye Who Enter Here"

In the *Inferno* section of the *Divine Comedy*, Dante describes the suffering of various sinners in different rings in hell. Dante tries symbolically to link each punishment to the original sin. He places famous historical people, literary figures, and even people from his hometown in what he sees as the appropriate rings.

Imagine that Dante were alive today working on a revision to *The Inferno*. Who else might Dante add to his list of sinners from post-medieval history, pop culture, or fiction? Unleash your inner sadist. In this assignment, your task is to pick two or three individuals that would match *Dante's* criteria for inclusion in hell (not necessarily your own criteria). These people can be real-world celebrities, historical figures, or characters from the literary works we have read in class. Your task is (1) to identify which sin each individual would be guilty of in Dante's classification system, (2) to select the appropriate rings in the *Inferno* for that sin, (3) to read the appropriate sections of the text to see what that ring is like and find particular passages to quote or read closely as part of your essay, and (4) to explain why the punishment in that ring is symbolically or poetically appropriate for the crimes. You may pick **two** or **three** of the following infernal regions: the Vestibule, Circle I, Circle III, Circle IV, Circle V, Circle VII round 1, Circle VIII (any ditch), or any single region in Circle IX *except those sections we have discussed in class*.

NB: You will need to read additional materials from the Inferno beyond those found in our textbook to complete this assignment successfully! You will need to use quotations from the appropriate passages in Dante's Inferno for discussion as you write your paper.

You may consult the class handouts from the week we discussed Dante and the materials available on C-N Online to determine what sins are punished in the various rings, and you should do appropriate background research from literary critics to discover the symbolism of each ring. Many copies of Dante's complete *Inferno* at the library for this class or online. You should read through the appropriate circles and print out, save, or xerox the publication information for them. You must cite from the *Inferno* sections dealing with the appropriate rings of hell for your paper--i.e., include quotations from a translation of the original poem. Copies of the *Divine Comedy* in various translations are available in the library, but if by some quirk they are all checked out, you can borrow one of my personal copies.

Six Final Tips:

1. Avoid excessive summary of the literary works. Assume I have already read them, and I don't need you to tell me the entire tale in miniature. Instead, stick to close reading of specific passages. If you want help with close reading, you might review these materials on the class website under the "literature resources" button.
2. Grammar and neatness count. Because faulty grammar can lead to miscommunication, and sloppiness detracts from the author's *ethos* in the paper, grammar and neatness are in many ways inseparable from content. Proofread essays before submission. Since you will probably be using a word-processor, remember to use the spell-check function. Theoretically, your paper should be completely free of spelling errors.
3. *I will not accept papers that are not attached together using paper-clips or staples. Dog-earring copies together is unacceptable.*
4. It is your responsibility to develop a clear **thesis** (i.e., an argument that your paper will prove or disprove). Focus on that narrow thesis, rather than wandering from point to point. State that thesis explicitly somewhere in your essay; I should not have to guess what your argument is from context alone.
5. This essay is formal in tone. Writers should avoid informalities such as contractions, slang, second person pronouns ("you"), and colloquial speech in favor of a professional tone. However, do remember that "formal" is not synonymous with "boring."
6. Remember that MLA format requires you to use backslashes to indicate line breaks in short quotations taken from poetry or metered drama, and that Dante's poetry is cited by canto and line number in parenthetical citations rather than page numbers.

