Rae X. Yan
University of Florida
© 2019

Guide to Final Project – Scholarly Introduction

Purpose of a Scholarly Introduction

A scholarly introduction prepares general and academic readers to understand the significance of a text. Scholarly introductions tend to provide general background information about the text's author, publication history, plot elements or arguments, characters (if any), and other pertinent information. However, the primary point of the scholarly introduction is to situate the reader to best understand the context of the work – the historical significance of the text or the ways in which it reflects important literary or theoretical ideas.

Scholars who engage in the composition of scholarly introductions need to not only provide close-readings of their text, but gather and synthesize information from resources that help them establish biographical, publication, reception, historical, and theoretical contexts.

Strategies for Recovering a Work

By recovering a work, we may be seeking to fill a historical gap in perspective left out by previous generations. We could be attempting to revive a once popular work that has now been forgotten. Beyond that, we could also be attempting to write against the grain—work against preconceived, simplistic notions about a work by showing its nuance, depth, and relevance to our contemporary moment.

To recover a work for readers in a scholarly introduction, you will need to:
1. offer some reasons why your text is in need of recovery
2. consider some of the major contexts that informed the production of this piece
   a. historical
   b. biographical
3. show off the text's most interesting interpretations
   a. the ways in which the text allows us to broaden our understanding of a literary genre, theme, or idea
   b. OR how the text reveals something critical about a cultural or social phenomenon.
4. give a sense of how critics have interpreted the work or similar works and set your own readings in relation to these past interpretations

Make sure to…

I. Read other examples of scholarly introductions to get a sense of this genre

Scholarly introductions tend to be organized according to a particular scholar's personal preferences. My suggestion would be to read through a few examples of different scholarly introductions (for example, from the Broadview editions of the books we've read this semester) to get a general sense of the genre and then decide what approach would best suit you. You'll notice that many scholars do the same kind of work across introductions—they will look at major themes in the text/s; they will talk about the biography of the author by discussing letters, journals, or other personal recordings; they will discuss major historical events at the time of

publication that may have affected the text; they may consider how critics contemporary to the text's publication reviewed the book; etc.

II. Be very conscious of only having 7 to 9 pages to make your arguments
Carefully consider the limitations of your page limit. 7 to 9 pages may seem like a lot, but you would be surprised by how quickly you take up this space. Many scholars tend to pick several methods of interpreting the text when introducing a text to an audience. As part of this work, they will often offer mini-literature reviews for each section. Since you are most likely picking a work that has not been written about as much, you will not need to conduct such extensive research. Nevertheless, you may want consider at least offering a small range—maybe 2 or, at most, 3—different approaches to interpretation or topics to focus on in your introduction and plan to spend 3 or 4 pages on each subject.

III. Focus on interpretation and not evaluation
It seems counterintuitive, but scholarly introductions are not spaces where you offer personal opinions about how good you think a text is or is not. Instead, they are places where people often offer interpretations of the text with contextual and literary critical insights guiding their arguments about *how* the text *could* be interpreted. Again, this would NOT be an appropriate time to use *evaluative or editorial statements* regarding:
1. your feelings about the work, that is, whether you like or do not like the text
2. whether this reminds you of something from your past
3. how successful the author is at doing or evoking something
    a. absolutely avoid arguing things like "the author makes the experience of ____ realistic" or "the author successfully makes the audience feel sympathy for X or Y character/idea"

IV. Cite appropriately using MLA
You can find basic information about citing in-text here: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/2/. You should be using short quotations from the text as evidence. When you use a quotation or even a summarization of a part of the text, make sure to cite the page number, chapter/book, or line number in a parenthetical citation at the end of the sentence where you quote the text. Given the limitations of space in this assignment, avoid copying long block quotes in your paper. When you do use a lot of space quoting or summarizing the text, make sure you use as much space analyzing the words as you do presenting them; do not assume that your quotations are fully self-evident.

V. Be specific and precise with your terms
Focus on interpreting the elements that are specific to the text itself (the word choice, the narrative perspectives, etc.) by being specific in your own language. For example, if you want to talk about violence in *Frankenstein*, avoid making generalizations about violence or using the term "violence" without thinking through what you mean. You should consider the many different kinds of violence: specifying emotional cruelty, physical abuse, and other kinds of interpersonal violence versus economic violence, social violence, and other forms of structural violence.

Rae X. Yan
University of Florida

VI. Offer more sophisticated readings
Make space to account for ambiguity and contradiction. Try to recognize and reflect on complications in the texts that you read. The *least* interesting and *least* accurate close-readings are often those that: make simple one-to-one connections; use terms without defining them; recycle preconceptions or generalizations without reflecting on them; and/or accept statements at face value. Most things in life are full of complexity and subtle distinctions of meaning. This is not always the case, for sure, but most often there is value in locating the nuances behind ideas.