

Gail Sherman
Hum 110
Fall 2003
Discussion of the First Hum Paper

"To express oneself badly is not only a fault as far as language goes, but does some harm to the soul." Socrates in Plato's Phaedo 115e

The conclusion I'd like to draw from Socrates' comment is that expressing something well provides benefit to the soul. Bear this idea in mind as you write the paper due next weekend. Remember that this first paper is simply that--your first, not last, and not only, Hum paper. Everything does not ride on this one essay, although it may feel that way to you on Friday night or Saturday afternoon. You have a simple goal: to make a coherent argument, expressing some of the ideas you have about the Iliad, in a way that is interesting for your instructor, and even your conference colleagues, to read. Expressing your ideas as well as you can may indeed benefit your soul.

What does not benefit your soul is intentional or unintentional intellectual dishonesty. Take a moment to review *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 65-75 for a succinct overview of this topic. At Reed, the Honor Principle rules, but it's helpful to have some very specific understanding of what constitutes intellectual dishonesty, and there's a handy summary on page 75. Diana Hacker offers advice on avoiding plagiarism (316-320).

You have a lot to build your essay on. If you took notes as you read and re-read the Iliad, you can revisit those notes now and use them to generate further questions. Take some time to sketch out some ideas, or an outline, or a rough draft before the end of the week. Much better to do some preliminary exploration than to wait until Friday after classes are over to start thinking --and writing. The important thing is to **write** as well as to talk and to think. Somehow, ideas look different, and develop differently, in writing from the way they do in the evanescent medium of our speech (or thought). Writing down your questions and ideas will help you develop a main idea for your essay. For help on brainstorming, or coming up with ideas, you might look at Marius, *A Writer's Companion*, 25-38 or Hacker, *A Writer's Reference*, 3-10.

Writing about the *Iliad* is a remarkable opportunity to think about a great poem, a complex work, a brilliant epic (not a novel, nor just a story). Here are some pointers on quotation to help you do justice to it. As you make your argument, you will probably want to quote a few important lines. Remember, quotations simply back up your argument: they don't make it for you. If quotations could do that, we'd be able to point to some part of the Iliad and say, "See?" And we'd all nod blissfully. How boring. It's important to explain what it is **you see** in these lines of the *Iliad*; you're quoting, not summarizing, them because you want us to see exactly how the poet said something. Here's a pointer on mechanics: A two-line quotation goes in the body of your text, with a slash between the two lines, like this: "They took position in the blossoming meadow of Skamandros, / thousands of them, as leaves and flowers appear in their season" (2. 467-68). Notice how you identify the source; book & line numbers, separated by a period.

Sometimes you'll have to quote more than two lines of poetry or two sentences of prose. To do so, you'll need to set the quotation off from the text of your argument, thus:

But the differences between nobility and people were not great in economic terms; the distinction rested on birth and consequent style of life. As the organs of the polis gained more significance, the tension between the noble's world of honor and the people's world of justice became increasingly apparent; and the structural dissonance...produce[d] a century of change...

Murray, 68.

A block quotation like this does not require quotation marks; the indentation sets it off as a quotation. Author and page number should be keyed to a citation in a list of works cited (such as I've made at the end of this handout).

Back to the essay: With the quotation in place, make sure your reader knows why you're quoting rather than simply summarizing such a long passage; I would quote rather than summarize if I were going to pick up on Murray's distinction between the "noble's world of honor" and the "people's world of justice." Do tell your readers after the quotation exactly what it is you want them to notice about it.

Once you've written a draft, give yourself a (short) break. Then print the paper and read the hard copy. Edit or correct it, depending on how much time and energy you have. Before you hand in the final draft, proofread it; if you can, have someone else proofread it. A carefully proofread paper shows the reader that you care about, and take pride in, your work. A spate of silly errors irritates most readers, and no one benefits from an irritated reader. Easily fixed errors don't increase your credibility. Use the conventions to increase your persuasiveness. That's all spelling really is, right? A rhetorical convention that we comply with to help convince our readers we do know what we're talking about? If you can't spell (or type), as a last resort use the spell checker, but understand that such a mechanical fool may overlook some glaring errors (such as leaving "fool" for "tool" in this sentence). Better yet, ask a roommate or friend to read over your paper. An outside reader offers an objective eye not only to mechanics of the paper but also to your ideas and arguments.

Your paper should have a meaningful title indicating what the reader may expect to find when reading it (not "The Iliad," but, for example, "The Funeral Games as a Model of Homeric Order." Number the pages of the essay, preferably with your last name attached. Finally, include the following information at the top left corner of the first page:

Your Name and Box Number
Hum 110/ instructor's name
Due date

I look forward to reading what you have to say, and to talking with you about your paper. When you get your essay back from your instructor, take a few moments to reread the essay, as well as to read the comments. Come to paper conference with some specific questions of your own about your essay and your writing.

Works cited:

Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 6th ed. N.Y.: MLA, 2003.
Hacker, Diana. *A Writer's Reference*. 5th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003.
Homer, *The Iliad*. Trans. Richard Lattimore. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951.
Marius, Richard. *A Writer's Companion*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1999.
Murray, Oswald. *Early Greece*. Cambridge UP: Cambridge, MA 1993.