

WOMEN'S VOICES: INSTRUCTIONS FOR WRITING THE SHORT ESSAYS

During the first half of the semester, students will write three short (3 to 4 pages) essays. Each essay should focus on *one* of the assigned *primary texts*. You are free to select any three of the assigned primary texts for your essays, although you should choose only one from each class meeting. To keep yourself on track, you should submit your essay within a week after the class discussion of the text.

You might address one of the questions from the reading guide, or you can respond to a question or consider an issue, topic, theme, concern, or concept that the reading raised for you. Regardless of the question or focus that you explore, the purpose of the essay is to come to a greater understanding about the text, and about *the author's perspective as she wrote the text* during a particular era and in a particular social and economic milieu. Make sure that your analysis of the author and her text is historical rather than literary. Focus on how the author crafted her text, in that era, to a particular audience, and what she hoped to convey to her audience, rather than focusing on how we (who do not constitute her intended audience) react to or respond to her text, or how we understand it from our present-day perspectives, whether experiential or theoretical.

Since this is a relatively short essay, make sure that your focus is sufficiently sharp, so that you can develop a compelling discussion. Present your thesis and support your argument with evidence (quotations) from the text. As you think about your essay, you can use the secondary sources that we have read thus far to help you understand the particular text, but keep your focus squarely on the particular author and text that you have selected.

After you have selected a text on which to write, begin to develop your analysis of the text and draft your essay prior to the class meeting during which we will discuss the text. This will give you an opportunity to try out and further develop some of your ideas.

For a framework for thinking about primary texts or documents, and for suggestions about writing an essay about a historical text (in particular, note the recommendations for verb tense—simple past tense—and voice—active vs. passive), please read through the *Guidelines for Writing a Critical Analysis of a Primary Document*.

Finally, write your essay according to the disciplinary conventions of the historical profession (historical analysis; footnote citations).