Researched Essay: A Personal Poetics

The researched essay in ENG201 needs to satisfy the following departmental requirements:

1. Write a well-developed, thesis-driven argument and analysis essay that uses evidence from literary texts and incorporate research, and are comprised of clear, grammatically correct, effective sentences in well-organized paragraphs
2. Frame research questions; plan research strategies; find and evaluate sources using the BMCC Library and the BMCC Library Website; and present the results of research
3. Correctly use the conventions of MLA documentation and citation, including a “Works Cited” page

In my classes, I assign this project as the third writing assignment in the time during which we work with poetry. By now, students have already read and applied secondary sources, and written one annotated bibliography entry. We have established a foundation for a practice of reading, engaging with and understanding poetry. We’re working with nature poetry, though this isn’t necessary for the assignment to be effective.

How I begin the assignment depends in part on how much the students have already integrated their subjectivities into the class thinking. A prompt that works well both as a way for them to think about how they self-identify and to think about how poetry works is “I Am From.” There are many online resources for instructors; the simple prompt and sample can be found here: [I Am From](https://www.wsuu.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/I_Am_From_Poem(2).pdf).

1. Choose one poem from the class repository, ideally one that we read as a group. Write a response to the poem: what about it is appealing, interesting, puzzling or otherwise asks the student to continue thinking? How does the poem reflect something of their own experience or interests? What would the student like to know about the poem, the poet, the place or time in which the poem was written, etc.? The elasticity of the assignment allows students to engage in the manner they prefer; the research process allows me to participate in shaping the final essay.
2. Class discussion: each student shares the poem that interests them and why it interests them. Ideally, this is the space for peers and/or the instructor to engage with these interests and to ask questions that might further the student’s thinking.
3. Follow this class discussion with a brief online discussion assignment: students should frame a question they think they can research. This is where I can help them to think toward the research process, and where I can point out the evolution of the thesis, from question to statement. One option at this point would be to ask students to create a digital board ([Padlet](https://padlet.com/), for example) to collect their research and writing process.
4. Library visit or introduction to using library research tools, specifically databases. While I ask that they be able to find one peer-reviewed source, I also want them to use research using the tools they already know how to use so that we can talk about the relationship to academic research and general “looking up” online.

Part of the research class should include time for them to attempt to research their questions. This is where we discover questions that can’t be researched and adjust accordingly.

1. The next assignment is for a list of resources, after research. To create additional work time, one class period could be research with the instructor present to assist. For additional support, I provide some poetry-specific research sources, including podcasts and online poetry journals. The list should include at least identification of the type of resource (Primary or secondary? Is it a peer reviewed critical essay? Is it an interview? A podcast? Additional poems by the poet? By other, related, poets? A definition of terms? Etc.), at most, this could be a full annotated bibliography. Students don’t need a tremendous number of sources for this assignment; they should be able to complete this over a week or so. A class discussion on the research process after they’ve worked on it would be helpful and may alleviate concerns about how they’re doing.
2. Outline including quotations from sources. This is a place where I can check to make sure they’re reading well and choosing sound quotations. The outline can be posted on Padlet.
3. Rough draft. While we peer review the rough draft, it is also necessary for me to read and comment on the drafts. I aim for a due date that allows me time to read with as little stress on quick return as possible.
4. Class presentation. I didn’t do this last time around, and I think it would make the final drafts clearer. The presentation should have time boundaries and format requirements so that students can think about how to prepare their summaries of their own thinking. The presentation time should also give me time to read drafts and another way of understanding student thinking. This is particularly helpful in the case of students whose verbal skills are more developed than their writing skills
5. Final draft. My deadlines tend to also be elastic in order to alleviate stress on the students. I give a deadline according to week rather than day. Students can ask for additional time.

\*Students are always allowed to rewrite/revise after their work is graded. My grading practice aims to support their efforts at clarifying their ideas.