

WIF Undergraduate Essay Guidelines (revised 2016)

1) TOPIC, LENGTH and FORMAT

A seminar paper (10-12 pages and written in French) best represents the informed close reading we are looking for. This is a more complex paper than a five-page essay or the beginning papers students sometimes write in basic introductory classes. We seek a sustained close reading of a literary work or works by one or more women authors who publish in French. The sustained close reading should be grounded in a scholarly context chosen on the basis of the student's topic. Suggestions of scholarly contexts appear below under "Secondary Sources."

Papers adapted from senior theses will be considered if the student is willing to make the effort and the adviser deems it possible. If a student submits a paper culled from a senior thesis, we are not to be informed of the fact; the paper must stand alone for the contest. The paper should be formatted according to the specifications of the MLA style manual, with margins no smaller than one inch all around. What was formerly the Bibliography and is now "Works Cited" may not include any works other than those actually cited in the text of the paper. Aside from the primary text or texts, the "Works Cited" should include secondary sources relevant to the topic or to the student's methodology.

An essay submission may be returned without review if it does not meet the submission guidelines regarding content, length and formatting as specified on the WIF website.

2) WRITING and REWRITING

Ideally, the ten to twelve pages will reflect both a certain depth of reading and some awareness of the scholarly context in which previous reader--critics have entered the discussion.

Students should make every effort to turn in to their professors a well-organized and thoughtful paper with as few errors as possible and to submit this to us on the recommendation of the professor. We occasionally have worked with a student to revise organization for publication to the website, but this is rare, and only in the case of exceptionally interesting and original work. We always note language errors that need correction for publication. We must see the student's original work and not a paper cleaned up by the professor.

It is advisable that students read papers out loud to themselves or someone else to catch repetitions and other errors. Language errors hinder comprehension, which could lead to misinterpretation of the writer's ideas. Therefore students must take special care to check for errors in French.

3) SECONDARY SOURCES

Perusing secondary sources on a topic of your choice is a little like reading comments in an online forum before joining the discussion. You have something to share with others on a

mutual subject of interest, and you want to read what has been said already before you chime in. You will agree with some commenters whom you may even quote (As John Doe said,...). While agreeing with others, you may choose to further elaborate upon the idea held in common. Overall, you want to be well--informed before you join a discussion, and graciously acknowledge those whose point of view you share.

Close, analytical reading conveyed through a clear, sustained argument is stunted by the absence of context or grounding that only secondary sources can provide. Which secondary sources a student reads, assimilates and consequently cites depends on his or her topic. For example, students who analyze a narrative motif need to know of any possible relevant contexts other than the author's *oeuvre*. Other students may read and cite thinkers or theorists who contribute to their analytic point of view. Some students might choose to examine a topic through the lens of feminist or psychoanalytic theory. In such cases, they may need to cite both terminology used as well as the theoretical basis for their interpretations. Other students may analyze a text with an awareness of historical or cultural contexts that inform their interpretation, and this "extra knowledge" will likely be cited.

4) COMPLEXITY

The student should not be attempting to handle heavy philosophical thinkers that cannot be presented without exceeding the limits of her or his linguistic abilities in French. We are impressed by the quality of the student's thought, not by the number of citations in the "Works Cited" or the relative difficulty of the methodology applied.

5) DEADLINE

The deadline is **June 15** to accommodate students on quarter systems. We cannot extend the June date any further because we like to make a decision by July first. Students should be available until at least July first to make revisions if we ask for them. If a student is not available we will move on to the second best paper, if there is one. We prefer not to award the prize if we don't have a winner who has followed all the guidelines.