Frenlit 219

GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCH PAPER

The research paper, approx. 10 pages long, should propose a personal reading and possibly thesis on the precise research topic you have chosen. The essay should be clearly organized, with an introduction, development consisting of different parts unified by a single theme or argument, and a conclusion.

- INTRODUCTION
To develop an argument, you need first and foremost to define the problem (or issue) you wish to resolve (or expose): without a question to start with, you will not know where you are going, where you want to go, and what difficulties in reasoning and interpretation you need to overcome to arrive to your point. This central question is what the French call “la problématique”. It can be as simple as “how is Labé expressing a feminine voice in her poems” to something a little more elaborate like “how does the voice staged in Rabelais’s prologue affect our reading of the novel?”. In your introduction, you should state explicitly

- your research topic (in a concise and precise sentence)
- a quick analyses of your topic (some terms might need a definition (like “esprit”) or you might want to explore how the different terms could play one with the other. Example: “La mort et l’amour dans Délie”. After having set the work in its context (date, author, first “canzoniere” in France), you might detail all the possible relationships implied by “et” (implication, antagonism, inextricable association, amour = mort ? ).
- your “problématique” or the problem being discussed, often quoted as a question.

- DEVELOPMENT:
Think about an outline ahead
Each argument requires a demonstration (as much as we can do of course) and quotes from the text (or articles and books) are great to sustain your point.
It’s usually nice when there is a progression in the development, from the simplest points to the more complex, or in a dialectical way. You might want to explore one solution to your original question after the other, refuting objections until you prove your point, or decide for a dialectical exposition. Some topic might be treated through a thematic development.

- CONCLUSION
State your argument clearly and maybe show how it is important, original, even decisive or unexpected.
Sometimes, it is a good strategy to come back to the original question to see if you got an answer in the end! Sometimes you can conclude that the original question was far too simplistic and that further exploration lead to a new question or a re-definition the real issue at stakes.

The guidelines above are by no means limitative: be creative, think, rethink, and get curious about the texts and how to read them. There is ample time to explore preliminary stages of the writing process: remember that you’ll submit a short draft (introduction and outline OR introduction and 1-2 paragraphs) for November 26th: this will not be graded as is, but taken in consideration to assess your progress and is mostly intended to help you out getting into writing and answer your difficulties before the final draft. It is only designed to help you.