



## Essay 3 Is It Any Good? Evaluating a Text

### Due Wednesday.

#### Important:

Use introduction strategy #1 or #2 described in the "On Writing" section. Or, you might find ways to combine the two introduction strategies.

#### Also...

Please don't confuse evaluation with classification. For example, telling us that X is a slasher film is not the same as telling us that X is a good slasher film. Don't classify!

My advice is to dedicate supporting paragraphs to specific qualities the text does or does not have. For example, if I were evaluating Emerson's "The American Scholar," and I'm following one of Arnold's criteria, then I would dedicate a paragraph to the question "Does "The American Scholar" form our fundamental values and attitudes? My next para would focus on whether or not Emerson's essay "sustains" us, while my final section would focus whether the essay "delights" readers.

#### As always...

- Claim
- Clarify
- Demonstrate with textual evidence.
- Comment on your evidence.

### Prologue

To a degree, it makes sense that we should spend our time reading and watching exceptional work. Why waste time with mediocre efforts? And while "participation" ribbons may have their place, we also want to celebrate quality work. (Sometimes we have time and space for only the best.) There are so many stories, plays, poems, films, and images vying for honors, so how do we decide? This is your chance to have a say.

### Assignment

You have two options:

#### 1. Evaluate a text.

First, choose a text. Make sure you have a good reason to evaluate your text. For example, is there something about it (some textual feature) that seems noteworthy? Has it been celebrated too often? Has it been ignored? Has a critic praised or dissed it?

Second, choose a criteria provided by Horace, Longinus, Arnold, Aristotle, Bloom, or Rorty (or another theorist you find useful) to evaluate a text. Don't combine criteria from multiple theorists either. Consider one of these questions:

- Is X a good tragedy? (Use Aristotle's criteria.)
- Is X a better tragedy than Y? (Use Aristotle's criteria.)
- Is X any good? (Use any of the others.)
- Why is X better than Y? (Use any of the others.)

#### 2. Theorize, then Evaluate a text.

First, articulate your own criteria of good literature. Your theory may be as broad as, "What is good literature?" or you can focus on a specific genre: "What is a good slasher film?"

Second, after you construct your theory, then apply it to a specific text. Demonstrate that the text does or does not have the qualities you describe. The key to doing well is demonstrating that the text has the qualities you say it has. So, you can't just say, "Eliot uses sensory images that invoke strong emotions in the reader." You now need to cite from the text and explain why those sensory images are so powerful. Imagine a skeptical reader who says, "I don't believe you. Show me."