

British Literature  
Senior Defense Evaluation

**Context**

You might wonder about the context of this particular stage of the senior project. Up to this point, each student has researched a topic of interest to her, has developed a thesis related to her topic, and has written a paper developing this thesis. I will be grading the paper. You will be one of the panel members to hear and evaluate a student's defense.

**Process**

After exchanging greetings with committee members, the student will present a summary of her research and argument. After the presentation, you should ask for clarification of any point that seems vague or unclear. After clarification, the committee should ask probing questions about the thesis, concentrating on methodology, argument, and support. The object of the questioning is to allow each student to show how well she understands her subject. Good questions will also challenge, exposing any weaknesses in her argument or research. We do not wish to dishearten or discourage students, but we do want to spur them on to offer as excellent a performance as they are able to give. Honestly assess the relative strengths or weaknesses of each student's defense.

**Grading Rubric Explanation**

We expect each student to have learned well how to think, write, and speak. I will ask you to be as critical as you can in gauging whether or not a student shows evidence of our expected school-wide learning results in rhetoric and literary analysis. I expect that some students will not have put forth the effort required for a superior performance. No student is guaranteed a passing grade in the defense stage. This year the evaluation will be by consensus, so I hope you will be candid. The following should help you understand the grading rubric with which I expect you to evaluate each student's performance in defense:

Initial Presentation

The initial presentation is a summary of the thesis, method, and supporting arguments. This is not an exhaustive summary of the paper. Ask questions that will lead students to clarify thesis, method, and support.

*Background:* The background is simply information that is crucial to establishing a context for the argument. Historical, cultural, and philosophical context are important. The student should have a fair idea where her argument fits into the accumulated critical opinions of a work.

*Thesis:* The thesis is the pith of the paper. It should clearly express the central argument. Judge the thesis for its having incisively accomplished that or not. Originality is another important consideration.

*Method:* The student should explain her approach to her problem. Does she approach the argument from a reasonable, critical, and arguable position? Are the methods of literary analysis ballasted by sound logic and objective inquiry?

*Support:* Does the student offer clear explanation and clear exempla from the text?

*Coherence:* Is the presentation coherent? Are purpose and approach clear?

Demeanor and Quality of Answers to Committee Questions

*Poise:* Is the student discomposed, extremely nervous, or obviously unprepared to answer some of your legitimate questions? Is the student able to admit that she does not know the answer to a question?

*Diction and Posture:* Does the student speak clearly and sit reasonably erect? Does the student converse engagingly with the panel?

*Fluidity:* Does the student answer questions smoothly and gracefully, with no major breaks or superfluous phrases?

*Responsiveness:* If our questions are on point, we should expect a student to answer most of them eagerly. If a student needs time to reflect, she should feel free to ask for it and reply after a reasonable pause. If a student does not know the

answer to a specific question, she should honestly and gracefully admit as much. Is the student hesitant to respond to legitimate questions, or does she seem to have a ready answer?

*Flexibility:* Is the student able to consider input from the panel without either obsequiously caving in or rigidly sticking to a prepared script.

*Incisiveness:* Student responses to our questions should be accurate and intelligently analytical. Are the answers to your questions keen and on point?

*Persuasiveness:* Are the answers to your questions compelling and convincing?

### Argument

By argument I mean the gist of the student's paper. You may not be able to devote enough time to this evaluation to have read every student's paper, but you should make every effort to do so. A day before the defense, I will supply you with a final draft of each student's paper along with a two-page summary. After having read the paper and heard the defense, how well do you think the student argues her thesis? Arguing the thesis consists of engaging in a reasoned analysis of the works under consideration and supplying evidence that supports the thesis. Our questions should be astute and should aim to elicit intelligent answers.

*Reasonability:* Does the argument seem either facile or too contrived?

*Evidentiary Support:* Does the student argue only from logic, failing to provide concrete examples taken from a close reading of the text or texts in question?

*Argues Well vs. Opposing Arguments:* Does the student mention any alternate points of view? If so, does she argue well against them or simply brush them aside?

*Logical Support:* Does the student argue logically? Does the student's position have warrant? Would the student benefit from a refresher course in critical thinking?

*Objectivity:* Does the student maintain an objective, critical tone?

*Originality:* Does the student show some ingenuity or genius in her approach to the subject?

*Precision and Balance:* Is the student sloppy in her argumentation or is she precise and sure? Does the student linger unnecessarily on one point to the exclusion of others?

*Understanding of Themes of the Work:* Does the student appear to understand the larger themes of the work or works in question? Is her argument congruent with those themes? Does her analysis harmonize with those themes?

*Depth of Critical Understanding:* You can probably get a feel for just how much the student knows about the subject she is presenting. If you don't think she knows very much, then evaluate accordingly. Does the student understand the critical concepts at play?

*Facility with Critical Terms:* Does the student use critical vocabulary with precision and ease? Does her using it enhance our understanding of the work or works in question?

*Sophistication of Literary Analysis:* How subtle is the student's explication of the text?

*Understanding of Critical History:* Any work of literature, however recent, engages in a conversation with the works that have preceded it, with philosophical ideas, and with literary critics. How familiar is the student with that conversation?

*Familiarity with Historical Context:* Does the student sufficiently understand the historical context of the work or works in question.

### Comments

Comments are your chance to provide any helpful suggestions, to encourage, and to generally balance your evaluation.