

# Re:Search

The Undergraduate Literary Criticism Journal at Illinois  
Notes from Professor Newcomb

A thesis statement in a **completed** work of literary criticism typically is shaped something like this:

While critics find that [this text] raises [this problem], I look at [this evidence] [differently]  
to **assert** [this solution.]

The second part of the send, looking different at the evidence, is called the *argument from evidence*, and it may be what you write first, especially in coursework where the first thing you do is work out your reading of a text. I like to think of it as an *argument from love*, because it usually arises from the aspect of the text that you love/are fascinated by/ need to understand.

The first part, placing your reading in conversation with other critics, is called your *critical intervention*. It arises when you go beyond the primary text, read the key criticism, and figure out which scholarly conversation your insights advance, and what your stakes are. For most of us, that part comes second, when you start doing research, although of course the two parts will continue to inform one another.

A **proposal** for a literary critical piece should be shaped similarly but doesn't quite make a thesis:

While critics find that [this text] raises [this problem], I plan to look at [certain kinds of evidence] [differently]  
to **propose** [some possible solutions].

In other words, the proposal names your primary text(s), the fresh approach you hope to take (the "differently"), and the critical questions you might hope to help answer—but it doesn't yet *have* the answer to assert as a thesis.

## On Finding a Faculty Mentor

The undergraduate honors page has some tips for approaching potential mentors:

<http://www.english.illinois.edu/undergraduate/honors/>

It also has some sample honors proposals.

I'd suggest the following steps for approaching potential mentors:

- Look at this page to remind yourself of faculty you've had (NOT graduate teaching assistants): <http://www.english.illinois.edu/people/specialty/>
- Look in room 208 to see when faculty have office hours, but still email first
- Email them! Say you'd like to follow up on an interest from a course, for a proposal for Re:Search, if not with them, they might refer you to someone else appropriate
- Consider attaching to your email the paper you'd like to expand, or reread it so you can talk during your appointment
- Mention that I'm happy to talk to faculty wanting to know more about the process.

When you meet with a mentor before submitting a proposal, you might ask:

- Would this paper benefit from expanding and deepening?
- What critical conversation might it enter? Get some key terms or names of critics
- Are there other kinds of evidence or critical approaches I could try (for the "differently" part of your proposal sentence)
- Would you recommend that I use a particular edition of my primary text?