

English 9  
Midterm study guide

The English midterm is 75 minutes in length, taken with 90 minutes available to help students with an extra-time accommodation.

For the exam, appear in uniform, without extra outerwear. You may have a water bottle.

I. Vocabulary. (15 minutes, 15% of total score)

Expect a standard vocab-type quiz, with about 6 items per section. There will be a word bank for sentence completion. Extra credit will count half the value of regular points, in order to encourage students to prepare properly.

II. Short answer. (30 minutes, 40% of total score)

The short answer section will center upon *The Odyssey*. You will have six passages to respond to, with some available extra credit, and we'll review the kind of passages you might see. There will be multiple questions for each passage, and you should expect to see questions about speaker, context, and significance, as well as more specific questions about themes, characterization, and style, as the class has emphasized.

Because of the nature of *The Odyssey*, where many voices sound alike, I will keep in mind what you might reasonably know. To review, you should know the main sequence of events in the epic, important characters, settings, themes, and aspects of the style. Be sure you think through the effects of what you see. For example, it's great when you can identify a simile, but be sure you have a sense of the purpose of the simile (to make familiar something unfamiliar? to emphasize the scene's emotion? to slow the pace of the narrative for some further purpose?).

II. Essay. (35 minutes, 45% of total score)

Here are three prompts. Prepare two of them, as two of them will appear on the exam, and you'll have to write one essay. You may not bring any materials into the exam with you, so you won't be required to quote text. Your essay should feature a good introduction with a thesis statement in the thesis position, three or so body paragraphs with good topic sentences and evidence, and a short conclusion that redefines the thesis in light of the whole of the essay.

1. I say *kleos*, you say *nostos*. Consider the theme of *kleos* vs. *nostos* in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. How does the theme relate to the main characters; what messages surrounding this theme do the works convey? In your essay, make an arguable claim for the supremacy of one idea or the other across the texts or for one idea in each text. Include one robust body paragraph for each of the two works.

N.B.: The body paragraphs may be easier to write if you divide the texts (one for each value), but you'll find it harder to come up with a solid, synthesized conclusion. Remember the skills you learned this year during the opening writing unit as you situate your argument among ideas. If you are arguing for one value across the texts, you will probably wish to write sentences that acknowledge one side while arguing for the other: "While \_\_\_\_\_ (text) exhibits \_\_\_\_\_ (value) in prominent ways, in the end the reader sees the text ultimately promotes \_\_\_\_\_ (value) more strongly.

2. “On First Looking Into Fagles’ Homer,” by you. Write a personal essay (you may use “I” but should in general maintain an academic register) in which you discuss the universal values and personal connections you make as you have read these ancient texts.

As we have discussed the texts, students did an excellent job of making connections to (and finding disjunctions with) specific personal experience, more universal contemporary experience (motherhood, learning to stand up for ourselves, doing our parents proud...), and religious ideas (the role of the gods—how Christianity is in ways similar to the Ancient Greek practice and how it is in ways quite different).

In this essay make a specific arguable claim, and then support your claim across three body paragraphs in which you demonstrate your mastery of the texts while arguing for their personal and/or cultural relevance (in a specific way).

3. If he only knew... Consider the role of dramatic irony in the two texts. How do the texts construct situations where the reader knows something the characters do not? While the general situation of Greek literature includes the notion that the listener or viewer already knows the mythological stories, each of these works sets up moments where the reader has specific information the characters lack.

In your essay, make a claim that includes the *effect* of the dramatic irony—this effect may include but should also go beyond the effect of suspense to discuss the more sophisticated (and arguable) aspects of characterization. Organize in a way that makes sense with your claim; you may move text by text if you find Homer uses dramatic irony differently in the two epics. In that case, you would have two robust body paragraphs. If you find categories of effects (or knowable purposes) of the dramatic irony, you will have three body paragraphs, one for each effect. In any case, your work should demonstrate your mastery of the two epics.