

Short Paper 1.1: Why Harry Potter?

engl 111 / sec. G / winter quarter 2011-12 / chang



The simplest place to begin any investigation, any line of inquiry, any exploration is to start with the first person that it must matter to—namely you.

Personal experience, personal opinion, and personal interest can be important “commonplaces” to generate questions, ideas, and arguments. Granted that most academic writing, particularly those that presuppose objectivity and fact-making, must depend on more than the personal and require complex claims, careful framing and reasoning, evidence, and analysis. However, that does not mean that the two registers — the personal and the academic — cannot complement or supplement each other in productive, persuasive ways.

To start this critical sequence, you are asked to draw on your own experiences as a reader, a writer, and a curious subject of the world. Think about the following questions (but do not feel obligated to answer them all like a laundry list):

- Why do you/did you read *Harry Potter*?
- What do you get out of *Harry Potter*? Why is it important to you?
- If you have never read *Harry Potter*, why didn't you read it? Why start now?
- Who introduced you to *Harry Potter*? Who have you encouraged to read *Harry Potter*? Why?
- Why take a college class on *Harry Potter*?

Using these questions as inspiration, write a **3-page personal statement** using the *Harry Potter* series as the occasion to reveal something about yourself. Use this experience as a way to articulate something crucial, intellectual, or profound about your relationship to the novels (and films). Though autobiographical and personal, this assignment asks you to use *Harry Potter* to reveal something about **who you are**, **what you do**, and **what is important to you**. In other words, it still needs to have a **point**.

A personal statement, like the one you had to write to get into university, argues something: get to know me, this is who I am, this is what I value, I am a good candidate because, I have something to contribute, and so on. Though your personal statement need not come out and say these things, it should reveal to the reader your personality, your drives, your style, your desires, and your abilities. The best personal statements give a lot of bang for the buck: short, specifically detailed, full of voice, appropriate in tone, answer the prompt, avoids cliché, and communicates an idea.

Keep in mind that you only have three pages, less than a thousand words, to convey something of yourself. Use the experience as a way to **focus** your autobiography. Also keep in mind that this is an assignment, albeit less formal, and will still require general paper conventions.

Targeted outcomes: 1, 3

Turn in: 34 inches, typed, no title page, proper heading, double-spaced, stapled

Draft Due: Monday, January 9, e-copy

Final Due: Wednesday, January 11, at the start of class