

# Short Paper 1.1: Why Harry Potter?

engl 131 / sec. 0 / autumn quarter 2010-11 / 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 “common places” 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.

## Goals and Outcomes

To start this critical sequence, you will draw on both personal and academic detail to answer the following big question: “**Why is *Harry Potter* important?**” Your response, your argument will be in two complementary parts: why you think *Harry Potter* is important to you and your life and why you think *Harry Potter* is important to read, teach, and think about. In other words, using your own experiences and your own ideas about the critical value of *Harry Potter*, consider the following further provocations (but do not feel obligated to answer them all like a laundry list):

- Why do you read *Harry Potter*? What do you get out of *Harry Potter*?
- If you have never read *Harry Potter*, why didn’t you read it? Why start now?
- In other words, what is your relationship to these novels?
- What is the cultural, political, artistic ‘value’ of *Harry Potter*?
- Why is *Harry Potter* important to read, study, teach?
- Why take a college class on *Harry Potter*?

Using these questions as inspiration, write a **3-page critical response** to *Harry Potter*. Think of this as a personal essay or personal statement that uses both autobiographical and analytical support to articulate something crucial, intellectual, or profound about your relationship to the novels, films, and cultural phenomenon. An outstanding essay will **be more** than just description or autobiography. An outstanding essay will **do more** than just make generalized claims about *Harry Potter*. In other words, the paper needs to have a **point**—you must connect the personal to the academic. Keep in mind that you only have three pages, less than a thousand words. **Be specific. Be precise. Be thoughtful.** 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, proper format, double-spaced, stapled

**Due:** Monday, October 4