

ENGLISH 490W: SENIOR SEMINAR ON MARK TWAIN I-SEARCH PAPER TIPSHEET

For the I-Search paper project, you are to choose a literary work or theme or some other aspect of Twain based on what you need to know more about and what you want to know more about. In selecting the topic to focus your search on, ask yourself:

- ✓ What have I become curious to discover more about, concerning Twain?
- ✓ What is important for me to find out right now?
- ✓ What should I learn about for my future as a reader of literature?

The paper itself should include as many of the following search elements as possible:

- First-hand or primary sources. **Try very diligently** to interview critics, biographers, and/or scholars. Correspond by regular mail, correspond by e-mail (do a “people search” on the Internet, check a university directory if you know where the scholar teaches, or look him or her up on the directory of members of the Mark Twain Circle of America that I’ll distribute, to locate e-mail addresses), conduct a telephone interview, or arrange a face-to-face meeting.
- Report on a discussion by the critic that you witnessed either live or via a videotape presentation.
- Look for any library holdings of videotapes related to your Twain topic. View them and refer to them in your paper.
- Engage in a thorough surfing of the Internet for relevant data—remember to report on success and dead-ends.
- Include in your search your own well-informed opinion of Twain’s works.
- Hunt for traditional print resources—books, journals, magazines, newspapers (including publications on microfilm or microfiche).

Here is just a sampling of the criteria that should set your I-Search paper apart from conventional research reports. Remember, too, to refer to the rubric to get a fuller explanation of how your project will be graded. Use these criteria as a personal checklist as you finalize your paper:

- The overall framework of the paper follows this basic structure: you tell what you knew about Twain before writing the paper; you tell why you are so intrigued by this aspect of Twain; you describe—in a readable blow-by-blow account—the story of your search for information; you tell what you learned from the search
- Your paper includes references to a variety of sources (print, non-print, interviews)
- You use research as a supplement to—but not as a substitute for—your own ideas

- You convey a strong, consistent writer's voice, through a first-person, storytelling narration
- Your paper demonstrates that the project was a genuine learning experience for you and is a highly-readable experience for your audience
- Your paper adds a works cited section at the end, listing dates of interviews, correspondence, web site addresses, and print bibliographical citations

Some closing reminders and tips:

- a) Shelley Fisher Fishkin's book should supply a book-length model of a high quality I-Search project. I will also have a folder available of sample student papers from past courses
- b) Your preliminary plan (either sketched out on the graphic organizer sheet or written out in a few paragraphs) is due on Friday, October 27
- c) If you alter your plan (that is, if you decide to pick another Twain topic) please inform me by Monday, November 27
- d) On Friday, December 1, you will have an opportunity to get written feedback on your draft from me and from colleagues
- e) I recommend that you develop a cadre of trusted readers in class or drop by the department's Writing Center (Ketchum 326) once or twice to elicit response to chunks of your paper-in-progress
- f) The final version of your I-Search paper (12-15 double-spaced, typed pages) is due on Friday, December 8