

Technics and Galactic Capital
LIT 190S, Spring 2016
Instructor: David Rambo

Paper 1 Assignment
Due at Noon on Monday, February 22
Upload a PDF to the Sakai Dropbox

Write a 1,500-word essay (+/- 150 words) responding to one of the prompts below or to a topic of your choosing that has been discussed with me. I will grade for both coherence of ideas and clarity of writing. So please proof read. Here are some guidelines to writing an A paper.

Literature essays are typically written in the **present tense** because the subject matter is the presently existing text and the ideas it expresses. Usage of the past tense is of course appropriate when referencing historical events as well as when referring to the chronological ordering of events in a narrative. For example, “When Arkady first touches down on Mars, Nadia had already lost her little finger,” would be acceptable. You can also write in the present tense here, though: “...Nadia has already lost her little finger.”

Use **direct quotations**. Paraphrasing is fine, especially when you need to get a general detail across to your reader. However, arguments are made with evidence. Strike a balance between allowing the text to speak for itself and framing the text according to your perspective. Usually this can be accomplished by introducing the quote as a particular case after having made a general statement. In this way, your reader will know what to look for in the quote. Sometimes you will want to integrate quotations within your own writing. This can be done to persuasive and concise effect, since you will be using the author’s own words in order to make your case. Just be sure it is clear whom you are quoting. In other words, do not rely on the citation to express your source; explain in your writing that you are or will be taking from a specific text. I do not require a specific **citation style** (MLA, APA, and Chicago are typical choices), but do be sure to follow a single style consistently (either parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes). If you adopt parenthetical documentation, which I tend to prefer for this type of essay, make sure to use proper punctuation: “quotation in quotes followed by parentheses and then period” (AuthorLastName page#). I often see the period put within the quotation marks, which leaves a floating parenthetical citation. That was MLA, by the way, which does not use commas within the citation.

Write your **introduction last**, and make it **short**. When composing an essay of this length, you need to get to the main portion of writing quickly. As concisely as possible, introduce your theme, your text(s), and state your thesis. It is a good idea either to rewrite your introduction at the end or to hold off writing it because only after completing the essay will you know exactly what you are arguing and in what way. An introduction prepares the reader by indicating what will be important throughout the essay’s discussions.

Lastly, here is some miscellaneous advice. A **dash** (“—”) is not a hyphen (“-”). It is used to interject either at the end of a sentence or within a sentence in the same manner as a parenthetical aside. By contrast, a **colon** (“:”) indicates an extension of what precedes it. This may be a quotation, a list, or what could be separated as its own complete sentence. I often see

students use a dash where a colon would be appropriate. Do not overuse **commas**. While this can be a matter of stylistic choice (such as using commas with certain adverbs), avoid improperly splitting your sentences up with commas. In short, commas are for lists of things, strings of modifiers (“a galaxy far, far away”), and independent clauses separated by a conjunction (“John Boone is charismatic, and he uses this to his advantage”).

On Friday, February 19, bring three copies of your **draft** to class. We will peer review in small groups and I will provide a response to help direct your final work. As always, I am happy to meet by appointment to discuss the course material and your paper ideas.

Treat these prompts as suggestions. Do not try to answer every question. They should get you thinking and help you to specify what you want to write about. Most will be about *Red Mars*, but you may write about any of the texts assigned up to the due date (in this case, through 2/19).

1. **Spatial Organization.** From the intimate walker suit to interplanetary distances, how is space in *Red Mars* differentiated and to what ends? What kinds of tools and concepts mediate the characters’ relationships to different spaces? How do these spatial organizations and their perpetuation contribute to interpersonal relationships and social forms? When does space seem to be an effect of these other social forces, and when does space seem to condition them? Does the mapping of space in the novel serve to map for the reader some of the possibilities for those building a Martian civilization?
2. **Science and Mysticism.** *Red Mars* is at once thoroughly scientific and attentive to the irrational, ahistorical psychic forces that have motivated human individuals and societies for millennia. How do the characters grapple with this pair of contradictory tendencies? To what extent are they really contradictory? Does one tend to subsume the other? Or is assimilation of one by the other impossible? You might want to consider the roles these two human forces play in managing the unimaginable, the mental frontiers or wilderness, if you will.
3. **Frontiers and Wilderness.** The strangely tight horizons of Mars feature prominently throughout Kim Stanley Robinson’s descriptions of the red planet. Due to the planet’s size and its mammoth landforms, the characters must make significant efforts to achieve a wider view of their surroundings. The same can be said of more metaphorical horizons: imagining a new Martian society without Terran baggage is chief among them. But an extended horizon remains the same horizon; expansion does not get beyond a situation into something genuinely new. And so a wilderness may signify an immense potential beyond present thinking, or it may just as well indicate fodder for the continuation of extant social structures (cultural, economic, political, and so on). Consider the interplay of different horizons in *Red Mars*: planetary, areological, disciplinary, economic, conceptual, temporal, spatial, limited, diverse, etc.
4. **Technics and Experience.** Kittler writes in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* that “within the spectrum of the general data flow, television, radio, cinema, and the postal service constitute

individual and limited windows for people's sense perceptions" (2). Between the theoretical texts and the novel we have read, we have seen several accounts of how technical media either constitute or shape human experience. Technical media refers to such diverse technologies and techniques as scientific instruments, drugs, machinery, financing, and linguistic constructs. By experience, I mean a number of different things: the immediate sensation of the world, the rational ordering of that sensation, the remembrance of past events both lived and inherited, the anticipation of the future, and the general features of day-to-day existence. Pick at least two texts and compare their respective approaches to this dynamic. You might also want to consider how other semi-autonomous forces—like politics, the military, and economic interests—interact with technology in the production of human experience.

5. Other topics. As mentioned above, you are encouraged to come up with your own topic. You may want to write about Utopia, the generic identity of Science Fiction, the "cyborg," human relationships, the "fines" on Mars, the commodity, how capitalism sets the stage for positive alternatives to itself, history, the environment, or the dialectic of personal experience and rational structuralist analysis.