Grading Rubric and Sample Essay

II. Grading rubric included in the course syllabus and discussed in class before each essay test:

Grading Standards for Essay Questions. We will use the following standards in grading essay questions:

19 = C   18 = C-
Competent-an average essay. Main idea (thesis) stated and adequately developed. Relevant illustrations used to support points. Shows a satisfactory knowledge of text/lecture. Writing reasonably clear and free of major errors.

22 = B+   21 = B   20 = B-
Good-among the better essays written for the exam. Strong main idea (thesis) convincingly developed in most of the essay. Effective use of illustrations. Shows a good grasp of text/lecture. Writing generally clear and correct.

25 = A+   24 = A   23 = A-
Outstanding-among the top essays written for the exam. Insightful main idea (thesis) that is stated clearly and developed convincingly from start to finish. Highly effective use of illustrations. Shows an impressive knowledge of text/lecture. Writing is consistently clear, correct, and fluent.

17 = D+   16 = D   15 = D-
Unsatisfactory-among the weaker essays written for the exam. Ideas poorly developed. May include factual errors about the text or show limited grasp of the material covered in lecture. Writing is frequently unclear or flawed by errors in the use of conventional written English.

14 or below = F
Failing. Paper exhibits one or more of the following: doesn't address the assigned topic; doesn't state or develop an idea; shows minimal knowledge of text/lecture; contains serious, repeated errors in the use of conventional written English.

Sample Essay. The following essay, written for English 2320, illustrates the features of a 25-point exam answer. Topic: the theme of human isolation in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein.*

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a Gothic novel that explores several themes common in Romantic literature, including the effects of human isolation-the separation of the individual from society. Shelley illustrates the destructive effects of isolation, showing that both Victor and the monster suffer emotional pain because of their separation from humanity.

<--First paragraph introduces author, title of work, and topic. Paragraph ends with insightful, clearly stated main idea (thesis).

In the beginning of the novel, Shelley shows that both of her mainn characters are naturally drawn to human society. Victor enjoys the company of his family, especially Elizabeth. He is close to his friend Clerval, and he works enthusiastically with his professors at college. Similarly, the monster begins life with a clean slate, a "tabula rasa," and because he is new to the world, he finds joy in it. Shelley shows the monster's longing for companionship during his time with the Delaceys. He love for them and wants to join their family. In portraying Victor and the monster, Shelley thus suggests that the natural state for human

<--Paper is clearly organized. Each body paragraph develops a point using "PIE" method.* First body paragraph shows that community, not isolation, is the norm in the novel.

beings is living within a loving, supportive community.

Soon, however, each character moves toward isolation, which results in emotional pain. Victor no longer writes letters home, spends all of his time alone in his workshop, and becomes blinded by the determination to complete his project. His actions make him anxious and self-absorbed. As for the monster, he moves toward isolation when he is hated rather than accepted by the Delaceys. His isolation increases when he is misunderstood while saving the life of a child; he is rejected by society because of his appearance, shot rather than thanked for his kindness. Both he and Victor suffer loneliness because of their separation from others.

<--Second body paragraph shows the initial effect of isolation: emotional pain.

In the later stages of the novel, the isolation of each character becomes emotionally overpowering. Once Victor completes his project, he realizes his mistake and does everything he can to separate himself from his creation and from other people. His unwilling to speak to Clerval or to anyone else only increases his loneliness. And by hiding his actions from Elizabeth, the person he loves most, he seals his isolation. As for the monster, his murder of William intensifies rather than releases his anger. He is angry at his creator, confused about the purpose of his existence, and intensely lonely. He even asks Victor to create a female companion for him, which suggests again that Shelley sees community, not separation, as the natural state for human beings. Rejected by Victor and society, the monster is loveless and without companions. Like Victor, he suffers the pain of loneliness.

<--Third body paragraph shows how increasing isolation leads to greater loneliness and suffering.

The fact that neither character speaks to anyone about his situation is probably the strongest similarity between Victor and the monster and the most important reason for their isolation. But the two differ because Victor chooses not to interact with others, whereas the monster continually attempts to make contact but is rejected. Thus, Victor might have avoided his loneliness and emotional suffering, but he chooses not to. The monster, on the other hand, has no choice and suffers because of his isolation.

<--Strong conclusion reinforces the writer's main point and adds an insight about the difference between Victor's isolation and the monster's isolation.

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*PIE method: **P**oint stated, usually in a topic sentence; **I**llustration(s) given to support the point; **E**xplanation provided to show how the illustration supports the point.