Group Presentations on Critical Articles

Each group will be responsible for presenting one critical article to the class. Your goal is twofold: to explain the workings of the essay on its own terms and to discuss its value as a model for the final essay. The presentation should last 15-20 minutes and should cover the following points:

1. What is the thesis or primary claim of the essay?
2. Most scholarly articles not only provide a close reading of the text at hand but also set it in some context (e. g. literary history, contemporary social relations, philosophical issues, etc.). Thus an article on *Frankenstein* might discuss its place in the novel tradition, the life of Mary Shelley, Romantic-era science, and so on. Many articles discuss more than one context. Which context or contexts are most important for the essay you’re presenting?
3. What are the author’s methodological assumptions? What does the author take for granted in order to mount his or her argument? Do you find those assumptions compelling or unwarranted?
4. How does the author construct his or her argument? (For instance, is the argument akin to a ladder in which each point builds on the last? Does it work by laying out a series of subarguments, all of which work toward the same conclusion? Does it present itself as a counterargument to some other account of the novel?)
5. What are some of the key pieces of evidence the author uses? Do they convince you of the validity of the author’s claims?
6. How would you characterize the style of the essay, and does that style suit the aims of the essay? Does the essay make use of humor? Does it make assumptions about its readers and their sympathies? Is its language markedly technical or markedly colloquial?
7. What is your own assessment of the article? Does it have a strength or weakness that stands out to you?
8. Are there particular features of the article that might make it a useful model for students in this class?

You may address these matters any way you like, and in whatever order seems best to you. You can use the whiteboard, a powerpoint, images, handouts; you can perform or present the material any way you like; you can ask questions of your audience or ask them to participate in some other way. Remember, the ultimate goal is to make class members more familiar with the norms of the critical essay and more self-conscious about how they themselves might write one.