EN 102 Hamlet Essay Questions

Select one of the following questions and write a 5—7 page research paper to answer it. You should use a minimum of three scholarly sources (more is better), and be sure to cite them correctly, using MLA format. (The Works Cited page does not count as one of the 5—7 required.) You may also propose a research topic of your own—but I must approve it, so see me as soon as possible.

1. Is something rotten in the state of Denmark? If so, precisely what is it? What particular images does Shakespeare use in order to describe Elsinore and the castle itself? To what extent does the setting affect the mindset of Hamlet or other characters?

2. Select one of Hamlet’s soliloquies and by a detailed attention to the poetry discuss the nature of Hamlet’s feelings as they reveal themselves in this speech. What insights might this speech provide into Hamlet’s elusive character? Confine your attention strictly to the soliloquy you have selected.

3. How do you interpret the nature and intentions of the ghost? Do you believe the specter is really the ghost of Hamlet’s father, or is it a demon in disguise? How significant is the fact that only Hamlet can hear the ghost? How might your interpretation of the ghost affect your understanding of the play? (What would Elizabethan audiences have believed? Conduct some research on popular Elizabethan belief regarding the occult and the supernatural.)

4. Discuss Hamlet’s treatment of and attitude toward women. How might these help to clarify some of the thematic issues of the play? You might want to consider the way Hamlet talks about sex and sexuality.

5. Consider the character of Gertrude. Why do you think she married Claudius so soon after the death of her husband? Were they having an affair prior to Old Hamlet’s murder? Or is there something in her character that compelled her to behave this way? Be sure to use evidence from the play to support your hypothesis.

6. Compare and contrast two movie versions of a particular scene in Hamlet, e.g. the “closet scene” or the “To be or not to be” soliloquy scene. Why do you think the directors made the particular choices they did in terms of setting, camera angles, etc.? How do the actors’ performances differ? Consider using Eisenstein’s theory of film montage for a critical vocabulary with which to discuss these choices.