

## Proposal Guidelines

Now that you have been tracking a keyword or a set of keywords across at least the first twenty-one chapters of *The Tale of Genji*, you are ready to formulate your problematic in order to develop a paper proposal.

The first step is transforming your keyword into a problematic, that is, a thesis or hypothesis to guide your inquiry. You have been tracking a keyword or keywords that imply a perspective on the narrative, whether conceptual or thematic. To develop the problematic, you need to transform your keyword(s) into a question. Although your problematic does not have to be stated as a question, it should imply a question. Say, for instance, you have been tracking “sound.” You might then consider what is specific about sound — does it make evident some aspect of this narrative or its world that would not otherwise be noticed? Based on tracking sound, you might formulate a thesis something like this one: “Even more than other senses such as sight, scent, or touch, sound demonstrates the profound overlap between the natural world and the cultural world in *The Tale of Genji*.”

Such a statement clearly establishes a line of inquiry by implying a question: how does sound demonstrate the overlap between the domain of nature and that of culture? It also allow you to divide your overall inquiry into smaller lines of inquiry, for instance: (a) considering how sound differs from other senses, (b) looking at different kinds of sound (of animals and plants, of musical instruments, of song, of speech), (c) exploring different ways of perceiving sounds, (d) the relation of ‘soundscapes’ and ‘landscapes,’ (e) considering what is nature and what is culture in this context (to what extent are they differentiated and how?). Thus an account of sound can be developed into a reading of the narrative. It might even open into a consideration of Heian court aesthetics and views of nature.

This is but one approach. You might want to take on a topic that is more psychological. For instance, the book makes clear that jealousy is a bad thing.

Jealousy destroys the Rokujō Haven who eventually drops to the level of a demon within the cycle of reincarnation. Women who are able to control their jealousy tend to do well in the world. Extreme jealousy and spirit possession, although an attempt to take control of a situation, may not ultimately empower women. At the same time, Rokujō Haven “succeeds” in that her daughter becomes empress. Thus you might pose this sort of problematic: in staging the destructiveness of jealousy, does *The Tale of Genji* endorse the idea that court women can only empower themselves by working with men’s infidelity? Or does this gesture expose the lack of options available to court women? What options are available?

Needless to say, whatever your problematic, you have to base your account on evidence from the text, which means that you have to be careful about selecting your examples and situating them. For instance, you cannot make an argument about sound based on one passage, and you cannot say that sound in general works in a certain way if there are instances that counter your argument. Be consistent, and pay attention to the consistency of the text.

Finally, in your proposal, you should make use of those readings from the course packet which are relevant to your discussion. In the example of the keyword ‘sound,’ all the readings that deal with perception and sensation are relevant, and maybe those dealing with other senses as well. Please cite the readings. You do not need full citations at this stage; the author, essay title, and page number will do. Anything discussed in class may be used without citation.

The breakdown for the assignment will be 5 points for the problematic, 5 points for the use of the text, and 5 points for use of the supplementary readings, for 15% of the final grade. The course outline also mentions 10% of the grade is based on the keyword(s), half of which will be applied to this assignment, that is, an additional 5 points for the keyword(s). In effect, this is like 10 points for the use of the text.

The proposal should be approximately 3 to 5 pages, that is, 1,000 to 1,500 words.