Choose one of the following prompts and reply to it with a 2-4 page, researched, formal essay. Follow MLA format and the Formal Writing Rules.

1. Do you consider Hester to be a strong female character? Is *The Scarlet Letter* a feminist novel?

2. What is the significance of Nature (Mother Nature) in *The Scarlet Letter*? How does Nature drive the plot and theme?

3. What do you make of Pearl? Although she at first appears to be a secondary character in the novel, Pearl figures significantly into many of the novel’s key narrative events. What is Pearl’s significance in the novel as a whole?

4. Children play a variety of roles in this novel. Pearl is both a blessing and a curse to Hester, and she seems at times to serve as Hester’s conscience. The town children, on the other hand, are cruel and brutally honest about their opinion of Hester and Pearl. Why are children presented as more perceptive and more honest than adults? How do children differ from adults in their potential for expressing these perceptions?

5. Consider the relationship between Chillingworth and Dimmesdale. To what extent are they dependent upon one another? How does Hawthorne juxtapose these two characters with one another?

6. Dimmesdale is a figure of hypocrisy who preaches virtue from the pulpit and refuses to take his daughter’s hand in public, but pays a terrible personal price for his actions. What points do you think Hawthorne is trying to make about organized religion? To what degree is Dimmesdale responsible for his own actions and how much are the townsfolk responsible for forcing him into his position?

7. The novel contains hints, early on, that Hester is descended from an impoverished but formerly noble family in England: "She saw again her native village, in Old England, and her paternal home: a decayed house of gray stone, with a poverty-stricken aspect, but retaining a half obliterated shield of arms over the portal, in token of antique gentility." There is a suggestion, toward the end, that Pearl may have returned to these roots by marrying into a wealthy European family, possibly nobility. What role, more generally, does class play in the novel?

8. How does Hawthorne describe the scarlet letter itself and in what different forms does it appear in the novel?

9. "Roger Chillingworth was a striking evidence of man’s faculty of transforming himself into a devil." What role does Chillingworth play? Do you think he is morally more degenerate than Hester and her lover, or do you have sympathy for his campaign of revenge? Do you think he redeems himself at all with his bequest to Pearl at the end of the story?