

_____ in *Moby-Dick: A Casebook*
by (you!)

A casebook is simply a collection of opinions on a specific subject. A law student might prepare a casebook of opinions representing the range of interpretation of a given statute; by examining how the court has ruled in previous cases, he can then craft an informed prosecution or defense of his case. In literature, a casebook is a collection of scholarly opinions on a literary work, or an *aspect* (there's that word again!) of it. So, let's say you are interested in the symbolism of the whale in *Moby-Dick*: your task is to select representative articles about what the whale might mean (he's God! he's Satan! etc.), and prepare your own written introduction to the scholarship, evaluating each article and shaping your own position on the matter as you go. Then you assemble this material into a "book." (Yes, it's a lot of paper—it even *looks* like a white whale!)

Once you find the articles, you'll need to summarize their content, making notes on the major points made by the writers. This will allow you to organize the material in a logical manner. Then, you'll prepare your written statement, using MLA parenthetical documentation, being sure to reach your own conclusions. It may be that you wholeheartedly agree with one writer's opinion, but more likely you will find merit in several of the positions taken in the articles. No matter: what you are doing is making a forceful definitive argument (in this case: "Here's what I think the white whale symbolizes") based on the scholarship that has gone before you. Finally, you'll attach a Works Cited and printed copies of the articles, and you're done. *Thar she blows!*

The casebook differs from a research paper in three important respects. (1) Rather than simply pulling details and random thoughts out of articles and carefully weaving (wildly cramming?) them into your paper, you are evaluating various critical positions. Being able to do this will be immensely helpful to you in college. (2) The articles are actually attached, so the reader can get the full argument of the original writer and can assess your views of it. (3) It is diabolical, like Ahab—a big, bad assignment for a big, bad book about big ideas for big brains...like yours!

Your paper should be about **four to five pages in length** (TNR 12, double-spaced, 1" margins) before attaching your Works Cited and printed articles. You should have a **minimum of five sources**: chapters from books, articles off Discus (start with the Literary Reference Center database), resources found at Dacus, etc. A bibliography at the end of one source will lead you to others.

I would prefer you simply staple the Introduction and Works Cited, staple the printed articles individually, and put it all together with a big binder clip. No clunky 3-ring binders, please.

In the Bedroom you'll find a sample casebook paper written by former student Adrian Rentz, in the junk drawer, that you should find helpful.

Now, dive in!

