*The Canterbury Tales* Guidelines

Even though the characters in *The Canterbury Tales* want to win a hot meal—and must tell a story that both contains a moral and is entertaining to do so—they tell their tales with differing purposes in mind. Some of their reasons include: to entertain, to improve the morality of a listener, to get money, to belittle another pilgrim, or even just to be the center of attention. Your challenge is to write a tale that suits one of Chaucer’s cast of characters. The tale may be in written in verse, like Chaucer, or in prose. The following questions and comments are designed to stimulate thought and give you some guidelines while allowing you creative freedom.

**Considerations while planning:**

* What kind of tale would you like to tell (religious, bawdy, honorable, sensational, etc.)?
* Who would be the best fit for this kind of tale?
* What opinions does this character hold?
* Does the character you chose have a vice? Does s/he flaunt or hide it?
* If the character you chose is honorable, by what principles is s/he guided?
* Would the tale be told after visiting Canterbury be different than that on the journey toward it? In other words, would your character repent after visiting the religious site?
* Are there any behaviors or institutions you wish to satirize? (The tools of satire are understatement, exaggeration (hyperbole), and the three types of irony.

**Within your tale:**

* How does your character fit into the social structure of the other characters?
* Would you like to give your character a name if s/he is nameless?
* Does your character repeat a phrase that could be included in your tale?
* Can you draw on your knowledge of other topics, (fables, folklore, the bible, the courtly love tradition, or the chivalric code, etc.) to enhance your tale?
* In what state of mind is your character when s/he tells the tale?
* The tale must contain a frame. Identify who is talking to whom, and at the end, how is the tale received?
* Chaucer’s details are often telling, revealing more about a character than seems on the surface.
* What rhythm do you wish to establish? Most of *The Canterbury Tales* is written in couplets, but feel free to experiment and play with other forms.

Excellent papers take these questions into consideration, balancing Chaucer’s technique of having a keen eye for detail, human frailty and understanding of it, and playfulness with language. Most of all have fun. I look forward to hearing you share your papers!