

Research Strategies

Jean-Paul Sartre: Existentialism and Literature Through World War II

For this paper, a biographical based analysis on how Jean-Paul Sartre's experience during World War II shaped his literary and philosophical work, I had to employ many different research tactics and services of the library at LMU. The availability and ease of such tools as Linus and Link+ facilitated the research and gathering of the material necessary to successfully construct this paper and its arguments with a multitude of sources.

Due to the nature of the person I was focusing on, it was quite difficult sift through the mass amount of information available. Jean-Paul Sartre was a very prolific writer during his many years as a philosopher, novelist and playwright. Having written well over forty different novels, plays, treatises and essays, one can only imagine the abundance of secondary sources available which discuss each and every one of these works produced by his pen. Along with these published works there also exists hundreds upon hundreds of letters written to friends and lovers as well as about a dozen volumes of a war diary that he kept during his time in the service.

The online catalog databases, including Linus, Link+ and the third-party journal databases were my starting point in realizing what was available to me when I first began this project. I was easily and efficiently able to locate what I needed and, if it was not available in-house, ordering the publication took no more than a few clicks. This left quite a bit of time for the actual reading and gathering of quotations and supporting ideas. After compiling a tentative bibliography as well as locating and ordering the work I needed, I went through the indexes of each book available to help steer me in the right direction. Through this method I was able to roughly prioritize which publications could potentially help my paper and save me from wasting time.

After I had a list of sources to begin with I would read through them, trying to locate any parts that would support my arguments as to how certain World War II experiences shaped Sartre's writing. This meant that I would have to start with his actual work. By reading his plays and novels I could get a general background on his philosophy since the two were tightly interwoven. When I then went back and read his letters and diaries I could see the origin of many of the theories and ideas reflected through his characters and plots.

What was perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of this research paper was the range of academic disciplines I was studying. I found myself pulling out history books, philosophy books, political science books, and literature. It really moved me around the library quite a bit. I was also able to locate filmed interviews with Sartre which allowed me to venture up to the Media Reserve. There was almost no part of the library that went untouched.

After some time I had gathered a good amount of support for the paper. While reading through these secondary sources I would often come across citations which gave me yet another source to look at. The footnotes and endnotes, I found, were just as important as what was actually said by the author. They often led me to a completely alternate idea or possibility which really helped shape this paper and myself as a researcher.

What I realized more and more during this research project was how effective and essential the use of internet databases are in efficiently locating the documents necessary to produce a strong argument and interesting subject. Given the amount of time I had to conduct the research and write the paper, the absence of these online databases such as Linus, Link+ and JStor would have had an enormous affect on the strength of the arguments presented and my writing as a whole.