

Hamlet Study Questions
ACT 1

Directions: Please answer each question in **complete sentences**. All Act 1 questions will be due the day after we finish reading it in class. For this reason, you'll want to keep up with the questions scene by scene to avoid having a lot of homework one night.

1.3

1. Before he leaves, what advice does Laertes offer to his sister, Ophelia?

What, apparently, has been the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia since Hamlet's return from Wittenberg?

2. Summarize the advice Polonius gives to Laertes—pick two or three of the nine “precepts” he offers his son and put them in your own words (1.3.54-80).

What are your initial thoughts of Polonius as a father figure after this passage?

3. How does Polonius feel about Hamlet's paying attention to Ophelia lately?
4. In your opinion, should Ophelia listen to her brother and father in regards to Hamlet's interest in her? Why or why not?

1.4

1. Why do the trumpets and cannons sound, according to Hamlet (1.4.8-12)?

What does Hamlet think of the custom (1.4.13-38)?

2. Describe Hamlet's initial response to the ghost.

3. The others do not want Hamlet to go with the ghost—they warn him several times not to follow it. What is his argument in doing so anyway (1.4.64-68)?

What seems to be Horatio's chief concern about the ghost (1.4.69-78)?

1.5

1. When the ghost initially describes the “tormenting flames” (1.5.3) to which he must return, he is referencing the Catholic notion of purgatory. This links to old Hamlet's description of his murder, specifically the manner and time in which he was killed (1.5.74-79). Why is he trapped—for the time being—in this purgatorial state?

2. What does old Hamlet suggest his son do about Gertrude (1.5.85-88)?

3. Once old Hamlet leaves, young Hamlet swears his friends who have also seen the ghost to secrecy. When Horatio remarks openly that the whole situation is “wondrous strange,” Hamlet tells the other men that he may be acting insane in the near future. How does he ask them to respond to this type of behavior (1.5.166-180)?

4. Based on this scene, when would you expect Hamlet to take his revenge? What do you think will happen the next time Hamlet encounters Gertrude and his uncle-dad, Claudius?

