

# ENGW 1302 Project #3: Research Paper

## (Worth 25% of your grade; due on March 30)

“Not just your [paper] but your research itself will be better if you ask at every point: *What will my most insightful readers be likely to ask at this point?* Still more important than anticipating those substantive questions, you have to imagine them asking these two rhetorical ones, *Why should I trust you?* and *So what? Why does this research matter?*”

— Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams, authors of *The Craft of Research*.

### Overview

In this project, you will start with your own particular interests arising out of the documentary film you watched in Project #2. Based on your interest, you will:

- choose a topic,
- refine a research question about a narrowed slice of that topic,
- locate 5–8 authoritative or scholarly sources that illuminate your research question,
- prepare a research plan, and
- write a focused research paper that advances a specific argument about the topic.

### Assignment Details

To increase your chances of learning and succeeding, you will build up to the research paper by writing two preliminary documents: a statement of narrowed topic and a research plan.

**Step 1. Draft a Statement of Narrowed Topic (Due Friday, March 4).** This short statement (no more than a paragraph in length) will help you narrow a broad interest into a manageable research question. Before you come to class on Friday, March 4, email me your statement of narrowed topic. Over the weekend, I will either approve your topic or give you feedback to help you further narrow your topic. If you are considering two topics, you may submit both of them and ask for my opinion about which one is best suited to this assignment.

**Step 2. Develop a Research Plan (Due Friday, March 11).** Before you begin drafting the research paper, you will write a research plan. This plan will help you shape the project and will allow me to get a window into the early stages of your research. The overall purposes of the research plan are to focus on what you are attempting to find out, to gather and evaluate research sources and other evidence, and to ask for my help early on.

The research plan is a highly structured document, for good reasons that I hope will become apparent. Please copy and paste the research plan, linked on the class website, and complete all sections of the document. I will read the plan and give you feedback in a face-to-face conference after Spring Break.

**Step 3. Write the Research Paper (Due Wednesday, March 30).** In the research paper, you will make and support your own well-grounded claims and try to push the conversation on your research question in the direction you contend it should go. A focused research paper builds a case for a substantive point. You are arguing for your point, which means you can't just demonstrate it or assert it; you have to advance claims and support the claims with evidence.

Because this is an argumentative research paper, you should not pretend to have no point of view. At the same time, you cannot simply base your argument on personal opinion or experience. You must deal fairly and

scrupulously with sources and evidence, even when they support a position contrary to your own. Most of all, your paper needs to have a good answer to the often-unspoken question in your readers' minds: "So what?"

## Advice for this Project

As you write your research paper, keep the following ideas in mind:

- This is a project about inquiry (about finding out the answer to a question) rather than about gathering ammunition to support a preexisting opinion. There is an ocean of difference between the two tasks.
- Refining your broad interest into a narrowed slice of a huge topic is a major key to success in this—or any—real research project. This project will help you develop your skills in posing substantive, manageable questions.
- You will hone your ability to read sources actively and fairly, reading them as what they are: artifacts of human beings' efforts to persuade audiences within contexts, and not as mummified bricks of transcendent Truth. You will argue about and with your sources; you won't simply transport their words from books or articles into your paper.
- Substantive research projects and writing require you to be curious (students should be driven by a desire to find something out), tenacious (students need to be like detectives, following clues, digging in), and humble (students have to ask for help; nobody is born knowing how to do research).
- Remember that your focus might shift as you dig into your sources. That's OK. That's what inquiry involves. You can always change your plan, but only if you have one.

## Evaluation Criteria

I will evaluate your research paper using the following criteria:

- Does the document meet the minimum requirements for length and formatting? (Approximately 2,500 words, double-spaced, MLA formatting, abstract of 125 words, Works Cited page, etc.)
- Does the paper draw the reader in with an engaging, precise title, then lead the reader through the argument using clear, purposeful headings?
- How well does the paper's introduction work like the trailer for a movie? That is, how well does it promise a clear payoff for the reader's time and attention and give a roadmap to the rest of the paper?
- How successfully does the paper provide a focused yet comprehensive "conversation" on the writer's research question?
- Does the paper advance a clear, persuasive thesis, then support that thesis throughout the paper using logical claims?
- Does the paper use 5–8 substantive, authoritative sources? How fully and fairly does the paper deal with sources' arguments? Does the writer avoid simplistic hero/punching-bag dichotomies?
- Does the paper successfully integrate sources into the author's own ideas? Does the paper always make it crystal-clear whose words or ideas are whose? Does the paper use in-text citations every time the writer borrows ideas or information from another source?
- Does the paper adhere to the conventions of standard written English (i.e., spelling, punctuation, grammar)?