

ENG 101: Academic Writing and Research

Section 092 - Spring 2010

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Project 1: Research Project Proposal

Assignment: To consider directions of research in a particular discipline or on a specific topic. This paper will serve to introduce you to persuasive writing and rhetorical situations; in addition, this will help you focus on selecting a topic for semester-long inquiry and research.

Audience: Fellow students within your discipline or field of interest. As the semester progresses, your audience for future projects will shift into a more refined and expert body of readers related to your chosen subject matter or field.

Length: 4-5 pages (1200-1500 words)

Citation: MLA Style

Purpose

You have the option to pursue one of two avenues for your semester-long project:

1. A topic/subject within your discipline, chosen major, or field of interest that answers a valid research question and is presented as an academic argument and/or contribution to a conversation already taking place within that field.
2. An inquiry into your chosen major or field of interest to determine whether this major is right for you and/or others. You are exploring every facet of this major, including the kinds of writing, inquiry, and conversations that occur within that subject/discipline.

Your final writing project will be a culmination of the research conducted for the first three major projects and more, resulting in a well-written, in-depth academic argument.

As John Trimbur notes in *The Call to Write* (Brief 3rd ed., Boston: Longman, 2005), "Proposals are a form of persuasive writing, and clear statements of problems and solutions, demonstrations of feasibility, documentation through research, and careful organization can all help make a proposal persuasive to readers" (340). Your goal in the composition of this proposal is not only to convince your readers that your topic is worth exploring, but also to explain how you will conduct the necessary research and what your advantages and limitations are.

Organization

Include the following sections, which total about four or five pages:

- An abstract or executive summary of your project (50-100 words). This gives readers an overview of your topic and/or inquiry.
- An introduction to your topic and conversation (about 2-3 paragraphs). Why have you chosen this topic? What connections do you have to it? You may incorporate a personal perspective here.
- A literature review of sources from your preliminary search that describe the conversation already taking place (about 4-5 paragraphs). As stated above, you may use mainstream/popular sources for this project; however, we will discuss how academic discourse typically discourages the reliance of such sources.
- A search plan that identifies your methods of research (the types of sources you will collect, resources you'll use, and research strategies) (1-3 paragraphs).
- Any advantages and/or limitations of your project, or possible outcomes (1-2 paragraphs).

Documentation & Technical Notes

You will draft your proposal in stages, beginning with a discovery draft in which you explore and brainstorm ideas of interest, why these ideas interest you, and whether you have the time/resources to pursue a semester-long inquiry. In the meantime, you will also begin a preliminary search, in which you are permitted to use mainstream/popular sources. Next, after some discussion with your classmates and me about your ideas, you will choose the best topic and draft your proposal. Then, after undergoing peer review on your draft and receiving feedback, you will revise your proposal according to your refined purpose and audience.

Because this paper is intended for students in an English course and will rely on textual evidence for its primary support, the MLA documentation form is most appropriate. Guidelines for this documentation system can be found in the Longman Writer's Companion. Include page numbers for all direct quotations. Cite any sources used in a Work Cited entry at the end of the paper.

All major writing projects will be typed, double-spaced, 12pt, Times New Roman Font. Your heading will also be double-spaced and will appear on the top left corner of the first page (your name, my name, course and section #, and the date). Your last name and page numbers should appear at the top right corner of every page. Do not skip extra spaces between paragraphs other than the double-space setting.

Evaluation

When I evaluate your proposal, I will be looking to see how well you have met the goals of the assignment.

That is, I will be looking for how you have considered the potential topics available to you in your field, what sorts of questions you have asked and explored to consider your field/subject, and what plans you have laid out in order to achieve your research goals.

Your proposal will also need to meet the general criteria of good academic writing: a clear focus, logical and purposeful organization, use of supporting evidence when appropriate, and thoughtful development of the ideas you are presenting. Of course, it will also need to be well written both stylistically and grammatically.

Project 2: Field Research Report

Assignment: Field research consists of information you collect firsthand; the most common kinds include interviews, surveys, or observation. Such information can give you insights into your topic of academic discourse that you could not get through print or electronic sources. Your goal is to collect and analyze information gathered from field research in order to gain a clearer understanding of the topic you are examining over the course of this semester.

Ultimately, you may conduct more than one method of field research; but, for the purpose of this assignment, focus on the method(s) best suited to your final project. Do you need to interview a professor in the Political Science department? Do you need to survey NCSU students to determine how many have chosen engineering as their major? Do you need to observe shoppers in a supermarket to draw conclusions on consumer behaviors?

Audience: For this paper, your audience will consist of students who are interested in your topic/field of interest but are unsure as to how research is conducted in that field.

Length: 4-5 pages (1200-1500 words)

Citation: Choose a style appropriate for your chosen field/subject.

Organization

Choose one of the following:

- Interviews (at least two, consisting of ten questions, not including follow-ups)
- Observations (at least four-five hours)
- Surveys/questionnaires (at least 100 distributed)

The field research report will consist of:

- A copy of your survey ballots, interview transcripts, or observation notes.
- A section providing an introduction and background information about these particular subjects to observe/interview/survey and their relevance to your topic/thesis/research question.
- A section discussing methods of your research (number of questions, type of interview; time of day spent observing, length of observation/survey collection, etc.)
- A section discussing the results and discussion of the data/information you collected. What did you learn? What does it mean?
- A section of limitations and conclusions. For example, perhaps you only observed consumer behavior at one supermarket as opposed to five or six. Perhaps you needed a larger survey sample to net more reliable data. Or perhaps you got results you didn't expect.

Documentation & Technical Notes

We will spend time in class learning about these methods and viewing examples. Discovery drafts will include drafts of surveys/questionnaires, interview profiles and questions, and observation notes (begin to organize them for the reader's understanding). All surveys and interview subjects/questions need to be approved by me before you put them out in the field. The first draft of the report will consist of the components listed above. Then, after peer review and revision, you will hand in the final draft.

Evaluation

When I evaluate your report, I will be looking to see how well you have met the goals of the assignment. That is, I will be looking for how you have detailed your research methods, discussed the results, and noted potential conclusions from the data you have accumulated.

Your report will also need to meet the general criteria of good academic writing: a clear focus, logical and purposeful organization, strong use of supporting evidence, and thoughtful development of the ideas you are presenting. Of course, it will also need to be well written both stylistically and grammatically.

Project 3: Annotated Bibliography

Assignment: To compile a working bibliography of sources for potential readers/researchers; to practice reading and summarizing skills; to learn various documentation systems; to practice drafting/revising; to practice research skills.

Audience: Other researchers in your field.

Length: 1200-1500 words (4-5 pages)

Citation: Choose a style appropriate for your discipline or topic.

Sources: At least six scholarly articles and two books (or five articles and three books) are required for this assignment. No mainstream/"popular" sources, unless they have a direct bearing on your project (for example, those writing about global media influences will likely use that media as a source—a documentary, for example). You should know the difference between a mainstream and a scholarly source by now. Also, since time is limited, I do not expect you to read entire books in such short span of time. I do, however, expect you to annotate sample chapters (at least two) from each.

For those who are researching your major, you are not looking for sources about careers or the major itself. Rather, you are looking for a sampling of the conversations taking place in that field. For example, if you are a psychology major with particular interest in mental illness, you might look for the most recent articles on treatment of bi-polar disorder or schizophrenia. You may also find yourself crossing disciplinary boundaries. For example, if you are looking at consumer behaviors for a marketing project, you may look in psychology or sociology databases for research about peer pressure or group-belonging. Ultimately, you want to find those sources that will contribute to the argument you are making in your final paper.

Purpose

An annotated bibliography is designed to give readers a brief overview of the current research for your final paper. For each source, you will include notes (in complete sentences) that summarize the information from that source. Remember to be specific. Be detailed in your summary, relaying the main points (including arguments, hypotheses and conclusions, or other information), but do not over-summarize.

Organization

An annotated bibliography is different from the sorts of papers we've written so far in class in that it is not a paragraph-structured argument. Instead, it consists of an organized list of sources on your chosen topic, each of which has a set of notes explaining the source's relevance to your research.

Example note:

"In the article she told of some of the positive effects of single-parent households."

This is not an effectively-written note because it doesn't inform the reader specifically about what those "positive effects" are. Furthermore, "she" is a vague reference (as is "told"), and "in the article" is redundant. Always refer to authors (or their subjects) by last name.

Improved note: "Smith reveals the positive effects of single-parent households as a special bond between parent and child, more shared authority, and more responsibility on the part of the children."

In addition, you must remove bias when writing these notes. These annotations are not reviews—you are not commenting on the quality of the writing or your interest in the subject or whether you agree with the position; rather, you are simply informing readers of the content. The more you know what you are reading, the better you will write about it. Read and annotate your text carefully.

Evaluation

When I evaluate your annotated bibliography, I will be looking to see how well you have met the goals of the assignment. That is, I will be looking for how successfully you have followed the guidelines of the citation style you have chosen for your field as well as for how clearly you have explained the relevance and importance of your sources in regards to your topic of interest.

Your annotations will also need to meet the general criteria of good academic writing: a clear focus, logical and purposeful organization, strong use of supporting evidence, and thoughtful development of the ideas you are presenting. Of course, it will also need to be well written both stylistically and grammatically.

Project 4: Critical Research Essay

Assignment: To enter into an ongoing academic discussion on a relevant topic.

Audience: Other researchers (students and experts alike) in the field.

Sources: The research you have accumulated over the course of the semester will serve as your set of sources for this paper (your bibliography entries, your field research, etc.).

Length: 2100-2700 words (7-9 pages)

Citation: Choose a style appropriate for the field or topic of your study.

Purpose

Teachers assign short critical essays and/or longer research papers because they want their students to emulate and become members of a discipline, be it in the sciences, social sciences, or humanities. Accordingly, the writing tasks invite or require students to enter an ongoing conversation and, as John Trimbur in *The Call to Write* suggests, "to position themselves in relation to what experts have already said" (430). Professors know that oftentimes you are a novice in that field or of your chosen topic of study. However, such assignments allow students to gain experience and understanding of what entails engaging inquiry and participating in the discourse of any field of study.

As Trimbur notes, "To understand critical essays and research papers as genres of academic writing, it can help to consider these faculty expectations":

- Faculty expect you to work with, not from, your sources. This means creating a synthesis of voices (which include perspectives and interpretations) instead of just summarizing what the experts have said.
- Faculty expect you to take ownership of the results of your research. That is to say, that you are expected to do more than "simply convey information from reliable sources." Rather, you use sources "to establish a problem or issue that has some significance." In other words, you need to establish why your topic is valuable, relevant, and worthy of inquiry.
- "Faculty expect you to identify and understand the central discussions, debates, and controversies in a field"—and to use them to find and establish your own position in relation to what the experts have said. In academic writing, the conversation is almost always ongoing and multidimensional. Your research involves learning about this discourse before participating in it. (430-431)

Analysis

Analyzing the assignment means identifying what it is asking/inviting/requiring you to do so that you can clarify your own purpose and determine how you will work with your sources.

- Provide an overview of the current thinking of experts: The purpose in this case is informative—to report on what experts in the field think about an important issue.
- Review the arguments in a controversy: The purpose is both informative and expository—that is, to explain to readers the positions people have taken in a current debate.
- Pose and answer an important question or solve a problem: The purpose is not simply to report on what is known, but to put forward your own analysis and interpretation.
- Position your own interpretation in relation to what others have said: the purpose is similar to that of answering an important question. The key difference is that instead of merely using what others have written as evidence for your interpretation, you also explain how your analysis or interpretation relates to the views of others, either in comparison or contrast (synthesis).
- Take a position on a controversy: The purpose is not just to report and analyze but also to make a specific argument. (451-452)

Organization & Planning

Begin with an outline to organize your thoughts and research. Remember: “You’re the authority who is immersed in the topic and issues of your research, and it’s your job to explain how it all fits together” (468).

Working/first draft: The first draft does not have to be a complete one—four pages is a good start to give readers and reviewers a solid idea of what you’ve got and where you’re going.

Revised drafts: Your revisions will be about achieving balance—what goes in, what comes out. You will also make sure your research question, thesis, and conclusions are fully developed. Additionally, you will continue to refine writing style for tone, clarity, conciseness, flow, and persuasiveness. Consider your rhetorical situation: Your credibility as a writer; your appeal to the readers’ emotions, values, beliefs, etc.; and the logic of your arguments and validity of your evidence.

Final draft: Use a guideline of about 7–9 pages, not including your works cited page. Your works cited page will contain every source you’ve used for this project, from mainstream to field to print to electronic. The entire project should be double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12pt font, proper documentation format (use your handbook or citation builder on the library website) throughout. You may also use visuals, but you must properly cite the source of each visual. Do not use visuals as a means of increasing your page count! I know the tricks. This should be your best work of the semester.

Evaluation

When I evaluate your essay, I will be looking to see how well you have met the goals of the assignment. That is, I will be looking for how well you have synthesized the information you have accumulated over the semester and how clearly you have demonstrated your knowledge of the topic to your audience as you enter into the academic conversation.

Your paper will also need to meet the general criteria of good academic writing: a clear focus, logical and purposeful organization, strong use of supporting evidence, and thoughtful development of the ideas you are presenting. Of course, it will also need to be well written both stylistically and grammatically.