

## Final Paper Guidelines

Proposal and rough outline due (post on the Website forum): July 30

Final Paper due date: Aug. 4

Please follow directions! Part of the reason for doing a research paper is to learn how to follow guidelines, which is something you will have to do throughout life as you use writing as tool for work or to apply for grants.

### Choosing a Topic

- Choose a media product or theme (film, record, TV program, videogame, radio show, website, ad, sports personality, star persona or media trend) and analyze it through one of the theories or angles of inquiry discussed in class (i.e. mythology, ideology, hegemony, culture, semiotics, etc.).
- Try to avoid papers about “what” something is, and look more closely at *how* or *why* the particular idea you are exploring became a phenomena. If you are writing about a historical moment, use it to illuminate the present reality. The purpose of this class is to explain why the media influences society and culture, so make that part of your inquiry.
- Keep your topics simple and as narrow as possible. For example, the history of women in media is too large. But you could talk about the difference between how housewives are portrayed in the ‘50s versus now, and why there have been changes. The subject of videogame violence too big of a topic, but you could explore the controversy around Grand Theft Auto. Comparing two kinds of media is always a good way to generate discussion.
- Your paper should revolve around a question you would like to answer, such as: Why are musicians being offered money to put references to Big Macs in their music?

### Details

- Your paper topic needs to be formally approved. Please post on the class Website in the proper forum one paragraph describing your argument and at least four bullet points for an outline. Make sure your topic has a question that you intend to answer.
- Six-to-eight pages (not including bibliography and cover sheet).
- The term paper will lose one full letter grade for every day it is late. No papers will be accepted after the final unless there is a legitimate medical excuse.
- You are required to submit a hard copy *and* email me an electronic version.
- Typed, double-spaced, 12 pt. text, cover page (with your name), number pages and bind the paper (using a binder, staples or paper clips—please no loose papers).
- I will not accept papers as text pasted into emails. Please format like a normal paper in either Word, PDF or RTF format.

- If you are concerned about your GPA and grade for this class, I suggest turning your paper in early so I can look it over. For early submissions you can have a chance to rewrite it based on my comments.

## Style

It's important that you learn how to write clearly and coherently. Therefore, I recommend that you consider the following suggestions:

- In your opening paragraph, write a clear thesis statement, such as, "In this paper I intend to explain/demonstrate/show..."
- Each paragraph should have a clear idea and topic.
- Avoid generalizations, absolutes and sensational statements that include words like "always," "never," "proven," "it's a fact," "brainwashed," "everyone," "society believes," "American public," "empire," etc.
- When ever and as often as possible, give examples of what you mean.
- Don't use tricks with margins, paragraph spacing and line spacing to make your paper look longer. I can tell if it's short by how well you cover the issues, so don't mess with the formatting to hide a lack of research or proper treatment of your topic. If you are a page short but do a good job, I'll take note of that.
- Use block quotes only for quotes over three sentences. And single-space them.
- Punctuation: please consult a style manual, but some common mistakes are often made. For example, please avoid using semicolons (;). They are not necessary and are often used incorrectly.
- Be consistent with style. Don't write "Reality TV" in one sentence, and in the next write "reality television." Choose one and stick with it.

## Sources

The first thing I do when reading your papers is that I look at your bibliography to see what kind of research you did. This flavors how I will read it. So, please follow these guidelines:

- You must use at least three sources.
- You cannot use Web only resources (journal and magazine articles from the Web are OK). *You must also reference at least two journal articles and a book.*
- Please use the library database and *use at least two academic journals for sources.*
- You can site chapters from the textbook. If it's from *Questioning the Media*, then list the chapter and author as a separate listing (see example below).
- Explore the library's book collection! There are lots of good books in there that you can use.
- Try to identify when you are making an assumption versus stating a fact.
- Please use MLA for citing style and your bibliography. Do not use footnotes.
- Source your reference any time you use a fact or statement that is not your own.
- Make sure you use proper sourcing format, it will impact your grade, including Web pages that identify the article title, source, and author(s).
- Please photocopy the sources you reference and turn them in with your paper (not the entire article—just the page you cite). There is no need to make copies from the textbooks or handouts.
- Failure to supply a bibliography will result in an automatic F; photocopies of your sources is not a substitute for your bibliography.
- How to site Wikipedia: <http://tinyurl.com/r7cfng>

- Bibliographies: please remember that if you are quoting a chapter from an edited book that has multiple authors, you have to cite the chapter, not the book as a whole. For example, if you are citing Thomas' "Myths in and about Television":

Correct citation:

Thomas, Sari. "Myths in and about Television." *Questioning the Media: A Critical Introduction*. Ed. John Downing, Ali Mohammadi, and Annabelle Sreberny. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1995. 444-59.

Incorrect citation:

Downing, John, Ali Mohammadi, and Annabelle Sreberny, eds. *Questioning the Media: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1995.

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### **Grading:**

Papers will be graded on:

- Originality of thinking
- Clarity of argument
- Proper grammar and spelling
- Organization
- Understanding of themes from this class and how they relate to your subject

A = Excellent – paper is properly formatted (including bibliography, page numbers and quote citations); your ideas flow logically with a clear thesis statement; the writing is lucid and includes lots of examples; you understand the terms and concepts used in the paper; you deal with the history and context of your topic; your approach is original or interesting; and it clearly reflects interest and enthusiasm for the subject.

B = Good –same as above but missing some key elements (such as clarity, formatting, spelling, grammar, organization, background, lack of focus).

C = Average—a paper that is not interesting or fun to read, is missing many of the features cited above and is disorganized.

D = Lack of coherence, sloppy research, no grasp of terms or ideas, hastily written, not well-thought out or clear thesis.

### **Plagiarism:**

Don't do it. You will receive an F if you do. I'm asking for photocopies of sources and electronic versions so I can check your papers. Based on the test I know your writing abilities, so it is easy for me to tell. Additionally I will run all papers through a plagiarism database.

### **Please ask for help:**

If you are having problems with your paper, please speak with me and use the writing center. I am assigning less reading for the last weeks so you have extra time to work on your papers. Also, I'm happy to look at early drafts if you want input or help with your paper.

### **Further Reading:**

*Here are some books and Websites that can help you with your research.*

[The Craft of Research](#) (Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams)

[How to Read a Book](#) (Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren)

[A Handbook of Media and Communications Research](#) (Klaus Bruhn Jensen)

Sources for media business statistics, ratings, viewers:

Brandweek (<http://www.brandweek.com/bw/index.jsp>)

Ad Age (<http://adage.com/>)

Variety (<http://www.variety.com/>)

Billboard (<http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/index.jsp>)

Some sources for audience research:

Pew Research Center (<http://pewresearch.org/>)

Nielsen Media Research (<http://www.nielsenmedia.com/nc/portal/site/Public/>)

Alexa Web traffic (<http://www.alexa.com/>)

Media Reform:

Free Press (<http://pewresearch.org/>)