

RESEARCH PROJECT / WRITING GUIDE

ASSIGNMENT

Re-read the syllabus and other handouts for instructions. The assignment is not just about writing a paper, it is also about learning the multiple skills required to write a good research paper. Your project should reflect your ability to formulate a research question, recast it into a thesis, initiate research to answer that question, find information and sift out what is relevant to your research specifically, draft and polish a paper that presents what you have found while also making a point. Explanation, not description, is the goal.

GOALS

* **Argue & Research:** Your paper should present your OWN innovative argument, idea or thesis, and be backed up by good research. The paper should be MORE than a mere *report* of already known facts or ideas.

* **Existing Scholarship:** Every paper should communicate how it relates to existing scholarship—this is the purpose of doing research. After the introduction you should be sure to discuss briefly the existing literature on your subject, including books and articles, and then specify how your paper (which includes both researched facts AND your own ideas) will add to or differ from this existing research.

* **Instructive Comparisons:** When comparing or showing the influence of one thing on another be sure to do so in DETAIL. Do not describe one, then the other; rather weave your comparison into one flowing paper. Compare buildings in plan, elevation, materials, structure, etc. Provide side-by-side illustrations for easy comparisons. Showing DIFFERENCES between two buildings, architects, or traditions can often be just as illuminating as SIMILARITIES. Do not just show how things are similar, be critical and point out how they are different, how the model or comparison does not work.

ORGANIZATION --Research papers have three basic components:

(1) the INTRO to the paper where you state your subject and point; this includes the THESIS statement, your "big idea", "main point" or point you hope to prove.

(2) your DISCUSSION of the evidence and ANALYSIS or ARGUMENT leading to the PROOF of the thesis

(3) a CONCLUSION that sums up what you have found and argued, and raises some future issues. Paragraphs are like miniature papers, and should follow the same tripartite strategy (thus there is usually a 3-sentence minimum per paragraph). Use topic sentences to introduce the point of each paragraph. Then present evidence or analysis that relates to that topic--and only that topic. Then come to a mini-conclusion.

Then start again on the next paragraph. Avoid run-on paragraphs and topic-less paragraphs that are simply sentences following sentences without any internal organization to the paragraph. It can be helpful to think of your topic sentences as the headers in an outline of your paper.

DRAFTS -- Write multiple drafts. Much like design, the writing process often includes at least three drafts:

(1) **Rough Draft.** The rough draft is your chance to push your ideas out, writing as quickly as possible, not looking back, not worrying about grammar or spelling or repeating yourself. This gives you a document to refine both your research and your writing.

(2) **Second draft** for general organization and completeness. The second draft builds on the first by reorganizing, adding, and removing sections of the rough draft. At the end of this stage, the paper should be conceptually complete in its argument and substantively solid in its evidence.

(3) **Final draft** for polished prose. Finally, when most parts of the paper are roughly in shape, the writer can focus on style and presentation. This is your chance to sharpen your choice of words, to add more vigorous verbs, to catch spelling errors, to correct grammatical mistakes and awkward passages. This is the stage that often separates the conscientious writer from the sloppy one.

GRADING: -- You will be graded on the following:

* A clear THESIS to the paper

* How well the thesis is supported by ARGUMENT and properly footnoted research EVIDENCE

* The QUALITY of research EVIDENCE (recent works are usually better than older ones, at least one scholarly journal article, at least one primary source, visual evidence)

* The CLARITY of writing (includes paper and paragraph organization, use of topic sentences, grammar)

* Correct FORMAT -- such as correct footnotes and annotated bibliographies, proofreading, grammar

DECIPHERING MY COMMENTS

- w.c. "Word Choice": the word you selected is awkward or not quite accurate. Select a better word; perhaps use your thesaurus
- awk. "Awkward": word, phrase, sentences or section is awkward or vague. Reword, rethink and make more accurate and to the point.
- this is "Vague": word, phrase, sentence or section is vague, or awkward. Reword, rethink and make more accurate and to the point.
- ¶ "Paragraph": break paragraph here. Make sure your paper is structured into a series of coherent paragraphs, each with begin-middle-end, about 1/3 - 1/2 p. long
- cf. "Compare": "see also"... (from the Latin *confere*)
- e.g. "For Example": (from the Latin *exempli gratia*)
- i.e. "That is": "also"... (from the Latin *id est*)
- w/ "With"
- (all of) "Word/letter Order": switch order of words or letters for correct grammar and spelling
- (to really be) "Split Infinitive": avoid split infinitives, put adverbs before or after infinitive
- p.v. "Passive Voice": avoid passive voice. Make sure your verbs have agents, and that inanimate objects avoid too much agency
- ref.? "Referent?": avoid too many direct and indirect objects ("it" "they"...). Make sure each object has a clear referent. When in doubt, write it out.
- sp.? "Spelling": check spelling
- tense "Tense": Make sure your verb tenses are correct. History is usually written in the past tense. Le Corbusier is dead and does not "DO" anything anymore...
- rec.? "Necessary":
- colloq. "Colloquial": avoid colloquial phrases or tone of voice. Use academic, professional prose.
- ~~was so~~ "Delete": delete these words...
- is
it not
^ "Insert": insert letters or words at this point
- was great.* "Footnote": all direct quotes must be footnoted, as well as all ideas and interpretations taken from any source other than your own imagination.
- expl. "Explain": Interesting idea, but needs more explanation, a bit vague or unclear as you have it.
- ↪ "Transition": the transition from one sentence to another, or one paragraph to another seems rough or not continuous. Make sure your paper and argument flow logically and continuously into each other. Avoid abrupt changes of topic or ideas!
- ↕ "Spaces" or "Margins": avoid extra spaces in your paper, especially between paragraphs. Close up all unnecessary spaces. Margins should be no larger than 1" on any side!