

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 raising money for your future projects.

### **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, technological adaptation, infotainment, etc.).
- You should refer to chapters in [\*Questioning the Media\*](#) for theoretical tools. For example, are you making a culture studies critique, or offering a culture industry (Frankfurt School) analysis? Are you taking a position of uses and gratifications theory, or media effects? All these terms are defined in the book's glossary. Please review them before writing your paper to decide which form your argument will take, and then go back and review the chapter that covers that theoretical perspective and pick one for your paper, or use your media example (such as Dove's "Real Beauty") as a way to explain the differences. You can quote the chapters in your paper to support your argument.
- 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. 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 in 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 source of discussion.
- Your paper should revolve around a question you would like to answer, such as: Why are music artists being offered money to put references to products in their music?

### **Details**

- Your paper topic needs to be formally approved. Please submit one paragraph describing your argument and at least four bullet points or an outline. Make sure your topic has a question that you intend to answer.
- Seven-to-nine pages (not including bibliography and cover sheet).
- The term paper will lose one full letter grade for every week 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 you can have a chance to rewrite it if you don't like your grade.

## 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 five 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 when possible.
- Please use the library database and use at least two academic journals for sources, including the Communications and Mass Media Complete database.
- You can site chapters from the textbook. If it's from *Questioning the Media*, then list the chapter and author as a separate listing.
- 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 copy 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.

### **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; and your approach is original or interesting.

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

C = Average—a paper that is not interesting or fun to read and 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/>)

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

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

Media Reform:

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